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## ARBOR VITÆ

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# ARBOR VITÆ

A BOOK ON THE
NATURE & DEVELOPMENT
OF IMAGINATIVE DESIGN
FOR THE USE OF TEACHERS
HANDICRAFTSMEN & OTHERS
By Godfrey Blount, B.A.

Designer to The Peasant Arts Society, The Haslemere Hand-weaving & Peasant Tapestry Industries, &c.



Third Edition

LONDON

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A. C. FIFIELD, 13, Clifford's Inn, E.C. 1910

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#### Dedication.

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TO ALL LOVERS OF HANDICRAFT,

AND ESPECIALLY TO

MY FRIEND

#### JAMES ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL

OF BARBRECK,

WHO FIRST TAUGHT ME TO FEEL THE WIDER LIFE OF ART,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.



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THE aim of this book is to supply a traditional basis of design for the use of those who are engaged in practising or teaching ornamental handicrafts. Very few people who embroider, or carve, or work in metal or leather, can invent their own patterns; and, although they know how necessary a good design is to the success of their work, they are obliged to select something which, they confess, has little interest for themselves, and therefore fails to make their work interesting to others.

The same result is only too evident in the work that is done in the schools and classes for handicrafts which have been lately founded in many of our towns and villages. These efforts to revive national industries are nevertheless the strongest, though the most silent, proofs of a reaction from the current ideas of art. It is because the movement has instinctively preferred to teach its followers to carve wooden bowls, beat brazen plates, and weave honest cloth and linen, instead of setting them to paint pictures, that we are justified in believing that a real renaissance is possible; for the first principle of all art is to create and decorate useful things instead of useless ones. We have forgotten this principle for a long time, and have been busy instead in making useless and expensive things, or in inventing labour-saving machines to take the place of human heads and hands when we wish to make necessary ones.

This neglect has brought about a separation between the artist and the artisan which is fatal to both; for the artist has lost that connection with the everyday necessities of life which keeps art vigorous, and the artisan has lost that touch with culture which alone can make his work beautiful. There should really be no divorce between these two, but that intimate relation which we find in all great periods of art. So long as the artist was also a craftsman his genius was occupied with the implements of everyday life, and in making them as beautiful as possible. A varied experience stirred his imagination, while the technical conditions and difficulties under which different things had to be made led slowly, but necessarily, to the selection of certain types and methods, and so to the inevitable formation of noble and permanent traditions, which must at last happily reassert themselves. But when the artist began to despise his necessary dependence on handicraft, he lost that hold on tradition which only the practice of handicraft had discovered, and took to painting pictures instead.

The aim of picture-painting is to realise—to make the copy look as much like the thing copied as possible. On the other hand, the decorator or designer is governed by the thing he has to design or decorate, and his object is accordingly to conventionalise or idealise nature. These two influences—the desire to realise and the necessity for idealising—are two factors that enter into all art; for you cannot invent the simplest pattern without some reference to nature, and even the most advanced realist is bound by the conventional limits of his frame. The greatest art has always confessed the necessity for convention in its subordination to use; it is only the modern art of painting pictures which claims a right to exist on its own merits. As its aim is to escape the control of tradition it cannot claim to have had any share in bringing about the revival of handicrafts—arts which, by their nature, are bound to obey the authority of convention.

We must not, however, suppose that handicrafts are uninspired and dull because they are tied to tradition, or that modern pictures are imaginative because they boast of freedom from tradition. Granting that the imagination is an important factor in the execution of a work of art, the power of producing deceptive likenesses of things is not evidence of it till the artist has introduced some feeling

of his own into his copy of the fact. The province of true tradition is to order the limits within which the imagination is free to act; it sets, so to speak, the subject, and leaves the artist to treat it in the way that suits him best. Its supreme value consists in its power of giving this freedom to every degree of imagination. In the present condition of things the purest imaginations often die unexpressed because they have never received the right sort of encouragement, and the strongest are driven to commit eccentric solecisms for want of the proper sort of guidance and restraint.

Everybody possesses some degree of imagination, which it is his natural right, as well as his greatest pleasure, to express; and it is the special business of tradition to direct the bent of the imagination that each one of us calls his own. The imagination of man—the greatest gift of God!-do not think of it as the stock-in-trade of the few professions which decorate our walls, and sing to us when the weightier matters of life have been duly attended to. Art is more than this. What is there, indeed, between the nakedness of our birth and that of our burial-from the first convention our parents wrapped us in to the inevitable ritual of our return to the dust-that is not the conventional expression, wise or foolish, of our imagination, that is not, in fact, Art, and the material from which Art, in the narrower and more specialised sense of the word, draws its inspiration? Art is the impartial censor and current epitome of our lives; approving, despairing, scornful, or full of pity, but condemned by inevitable necessity to change its fashions with the fashion of the world it echoes.

Without our imagination we are only as the beasts that perish. It is the working capital of the world—the "ability" which is always finding new fields for our enterprise and improvement; it is wealth constantly spent in evoking new interest of wealth. Everything has to be imagined before it becomes a fact; Columbus imagined America before he found it, and Pheidias saw the frieze of the Parthenon on its walls while the stones were still unquarried. We probe, with sensitive antennæ, before we trust ourselves on any road.

The significance and importance of the revival of handicrafts

depends on how we regard it. We must not think of it as a novel occupation for idle hours, or even as a philanthropic trick to entice the labourer from the public-house and his hard bargain of beer, but as the dawning of nobler conceptions of the charm of labour and of the unity of life. It is an evidence of the healthy desire to escape from the monotonous tyranny of machinery; but let us take care to understand why we dislike that tyranny before we jump at the conclusion that a return to handicraft is in itself an unmitigated benefit.

Machinery makes a great many copies of one thing very rapidly, and all of them exactly alike; handicraft makes fewer things, more slowly, and no two of them exactly alike. There is no inherent virtue in either the presence or absence of these qualities. A thing is not necessarily bad because it has been made often, quickly, or in the same way; nor necessarily good because it has been made seldom, slowly, and differently every time. The conditions of the manufacture are only important when they affect the quality of the things made and the happiness of the people who make them, as well as of the people who use them. The happiness of the maker depends on his being able to impress what he is making with his own feeling; in other words, the value of a thing depends on our power of appreciating the imagination that made it. The tendency of machinery is to reduce the importance of the imagination, and the triumph of handicraft is to extol it. But that does not mean that if anything is made by hand it must necessarily be good, but only that to make a really noble thing well, you must make it by hand.

Machinery has exercised tyranny over our lives because we have despised our imagination; and no revival of handicraft is possible till we determine to follow it with all our hearts, as a sacred charge, and not as a temporary relief and passing fancy. If we undertake it in this spirit we shall find that tradition does not prevent the legitimate exercise of the imagination, but fosters and encourages it. Nevertheless, while it leads it forward by unerring steps, it keeps a stern check on any attempt at lawlessness, which is apt to be occasionally mistaken for it.

It is usual to think of the imagination as an entirely original and creative power; but for one person who can invent, a thousand can appreciate, and appreciation is none the less a form of imagination, and capable of expression—though the unseemly haste which swept away tradition left our appreciative power without the means of expressing itself. We must keep these two forms of the imagination very clearly distinct. The first and rarest is original and creative; the second appreciative and spontaneous. One man composes a new melody; that is creative and original Art. Another man sings it with passion and enthusiasm; that is appreciative and spontaneous Art. The imagination of many people is engrossed and satisfied by the part they take in a beautiful ritual. Their united action constitutes a work of art, though none of them invented the form of it. Shake-speare has written plays, and generations of actors have rendered them; but we praise the actor for the spontaneity with which he plays his part, for that genius of appreciation and sympathy which lets him give us the poet's originality second-hand. We never question the just preponderance of the appreciative kind of imagination in music and the drama, but the anomalous conditions of modern Art demand that every artist should display power of original qualities, or starve. class of men, in consequence, whose peculiar talents could easily be spent in making the whole of life more beautiful and interesting, prefer to waste their time in useless and aimless rivalry, because they are ignorant of humbler possibilities, and greedy of the success and fame that can only fall to the lot of a few. There is nothing new under the sun, and the genius of the most original artist rather extends the limits of preceding traditions than invents new ones. He shows us how to cultivate old fields in new ways. His career is that of a pioneer or an explorer. He cannot alone exploit the whole of the treasure he has brought to light, but all who care to follow in his steps can find ample room for enterprise and ambition. Indeed, in the first flush of our enthusiasm, we are apt to believe at such times that a new revelation has been vouchsafed us, and seize on every novel characteristic to develop it to an unprecedented extent. This is the way in which link by link the chain of tradition is forged.

As the world grows older we are constantly obliged to find new expressions for new feelings. We shall realise ourselves most completely when we recognise that our pulse is meant to beat in time with the larger pulses of a growing world; that a subtle sympathy exists between what happens to us and the way we express our feelings, and that the whole Art of the present is dependent on that of the past. If this is true, the original artist or poet is not only specially gifted to give voice to the emotional needs of his own time, but in order to give that expression a permanent character, he must be a man capable of moulding it into harmony with the Art of all time, by virtue of his sympathy with the feelings of the past.

Spontaneous Art is not necessarily original, but all original Art must be spontaneous. Spontaneity is a necessary quality of all Art. To speak, write, play, or paint, out of our hearts, easily or with effort, joyfully or sadly—that is Art, because that is the only thing that men care to treasure through all change of style and oscillation of fashion. We are obliged just now to distinguish carefully between what is done with the heart and what is done without it, because students of Art are taught to-day how to analyse the body of past tradition, and not how to sympathise with its spirit. Every age mistakes itself for the last. We make our boast of eclecticism. pick and choose and judge, but the verdict of Time is only mindful of action, and will depend, not on what we thought of other people's work, but on what sort of work we did ourselves. Men write in books what they think, not always what they feel. In Art, men can only express what they feel. It is the irrevocable confession of our hearts. Truest of all methods of speech, it is impossible for Art to say one thing and mean another. It is obliged to tell you unmistakably if it is the work of an honest and wise man, or of a rogue and fool. This wonderful language of truth has its alphabet and grammar like any other language, its mysteries into which you must be initiated before you can read or write its secrets. accumulated lore of art, the sacred books of its Tradition, are still to be seen in archaic Greek vase and tapestry of early Christian Egypt, on Sicilian embroideries and rough Italian majolica, in Scandinavian fibula and Irish missal: wherever, in fact, men have had a faith that made them happy, or love for Life has inspired the craftsman.

To every generation an uncompromising Sibyl brings fewer volumes back, for the work of destruction and neglect proceeds apace, and offers them to us for the same price. To-day we are beginning to haggle with her for what remains of that unerring script which tells how man thought and felt, how men may still learn to express their thoughts and feelings. Its language is the universal one of Tradition, the common tongue in which Greek, Egyptian, Italian, Teuton, and Celt tells his own tale, gives us his own view of things, and the particular feelings that made him Greek or Barbarian. And if we are to acquire the same authority for ourselves, or any claim to the respect of future ages, it will not be by posing as Greek or Latin, Egyptian or German, but by learning to express our own feelings in this common language.

Though it has many dialects, Art has only two styles—the good style, and the bad style. We are not Greeks, or Egyptians, or Persians, or Germans, or Celts, still less Japanese or Polynesian; we live in the present day, and in no other century before or after Christ; and we can neither build nor paint in the style or time of any other nation or school, for the very simple reason that the conditions under which we happen to live, whether favourable to Art or not, are those of the present day and not of any other. Other times may have important lessons for us, may indeed become our schoolmasters, but we must not mistake our school studies for original compositions, or limit our horizon to the pages of an exercise book.

Art is the language and the expression of the heart, as opposed to the intellect. If it is a literature, we must take care that it is not literary. It is a total misconception of the first use and purpose of Art to think of it as merely a convenient adjunct to a written description, for its peculiar quality as distinct from literature lies in the fact that its message cannot be written in any other words than its own. It may illustrate the same feeling, or the same fact, as an accompanying text describes; but it must illustrate it from an entirely

different point of view, and must be able to stand by itself as a work of Art, quite independently of the letterpress.

The page of a twelfth-century Missal, or Richter's illustrations to the Lord's Prayer, are each perfect specimens of illustrative Art, because each is independent of the words it pretends to illustrate. We can gloat over the delicate tact of the mediæval scribe without knowing a word of Latin, and appreciate the subtle tenderness of the great German master without necessarily following him to church. But as soon as your picture requires words to explain its meaning, you may be sure that as a work of art it is worthless, whatever the quality and correctness of the draughtsmanship.

Art is indeed a system of symbols, but it is a poor art that requires labelling like the samples in a chemist's shop. It ought to have a mysterious charm of its own, and to give you a certain feeling in a way nothing else can. An allegorical figure of "Chastity," for instance, must be essentially chaste, and no mere change of label on waistband or fillet should be able to change her into "Justice" or "Ireland." The label is the epitome of all you have to avoid in imaginative art. When you feel the necessity for one in your work it is time to distrust your imagination. Do not label your figures "Youth," "Spring," "Love," but let your design teem with love, spring, and youth, and nobody will ask for your index.

One of the worst results of the separation between artist and workman is seen in the popular misconception of what is really classical art. The single statues of post-Pheidian times are quoted as the culminating triumphs of Greek art, the goal towards which all her earlier efforts aimed; and the affected and exclusive admiration of these examples has bitten deeply into our system of thought and teaching, and has corrupted popular taste to such a degree that we have learnt to admire and even to cultivate a certain regularity of feature and inanity of expression under the impression that they resemble the specially Greek virtues of dignity and restraint, with which we are told these works of art are peculiarly endowed. But whether the Apollos, Venuses, Athletes, and Hermaphrodites of later Greek art are dignified or not, they cannot be said to illustrate the

same feelings which inspired the artists of earlier and more archaic days. Both are Greek, but the earlier work exhibits the qualities that made Greece great, and is therefore classical; the latter reveals the vices that ruined her. The restraint and dignity of true classical art is the representation of the victory of a restrained mind over an unrestrained one, and it illustrates this victory, not by the selection of types of beauty, but by using the simplest types of expression, and the stern refusal of all redundant accessories. The profuse worship of languid and self-conscious sensuality, or of ideals which are only athletic, is neither restrained nor dignified. We ought to learn to distinguish between the early and more vigorous style of Art, and the later and more effete one, if we wish to realise for ourselves, as we often say we do, that wider citizenship of which Greek life remains such a brilliant example.

All Art is the expression of the life of its time, and the best art of Greece, as of all civilisations that are essentially democratic, must be that which illustrates the coherence of a community instead of the isolated independence of its members. There are, it is true, single figures and simple groups in early Greek art, but they are primarily dominated by a religious spirit, and an essentially didactic intention rather than an æsthetic one; and no sooner is this pious and preliminary duty satisfied than the "play instinct" of the nation asserts itself, and seizes at once on a corporate view of life as the proper subject for it to delight in and perpetuate; a duty which it achieves most successfully in the processional length of the frieze, and the endless girdle of the vase. When a nation prefers to carve or paint single and self-satisfied figures, instead of groups of interdependent and mutually helpful ones, its sense of a corporate patriotism is evidently dulled or dead, and the old enthusiastic and imaginative standard of criticism has to give way to theoretical and realistic ones. All Art arises in sensation, in the delight of feeling alive, then in the feeling of community and the impulse to express an orderly relation between living things. Its greatest triumph is to create a harmony out of the infinite and subtle discords of Nature, as each age apprehends them, and to establish a connection between

the soul of things and the body of them, where no connection was previously seen to exist. Though we must necessarily derive our laws of Art from Nature, it is from our guesses at her gathered intention and not from her immediate instances. Nature herself seldom, if ever, presents us with a satisfactory example of the laws of Art. She neither tames the lion nor bridles the steed. Her beauty is that of a tropical forest—savage, anarchic, competitive; a place where the weakest must inevitably go to the wall. But the loving humanity of a truly "artistic temperament" links first things and last things together; it releases us from our confusion in the vast and incomprehensible presence of Nature, and creates for us a harmonious little world which enables us to enter into the heart of the larger one.

There seems nothing in Nature, outside man himself, that regards the welfare of the community; and though there are a few things that excite our admiration, such as an "occasional sunset," or the constant repetition of one phrase in the blackbird's song, it is on account of its resemblance to our own orderly systems of arrangement that we justify them. So that this power of ordering and arranging is the element of Art that differentiates man from the rest of Nature. His mission is to turn the wild forest into a garden, and to tame and name the wild beasts in it.

Our delight in the sense of order and relation, of bringing different things together in unexpected fashions, is infinitely more precious to us than the pleasure we get from merely noting facts and emphasising occurrences, which is the scientific estimate of the whole duty of an artist. Every effort to compete with Nature on her own terms must result in disappointment, because Nature's scale in light, colour, and detail is so much more extended than ours is. If, however, we work from our own imagination, we do so with a reasonable chance of success, because we aim at a standard of perfection which is our own.

The decorative or imaginative faculty in us is innate and instinctive, while the power to represent external facts in pictorial form is an intellectual accomplishment that can only be acquired

with long practice. All Art, as we have said, comprises both in varying proportions; but it is not necessary to wait till we have gained great power of realisation before we can do delightful things. Art is good, whenever the artist's knowledge of facts, however limited, is controlled, and fully displayed by his sense of design. The frieze of the Parthenon is good, not because the figures are accurately carved, or ideally conceived, but because an unbroken rhythm runs through the whole of it. The horse-race on an archaic vase two hundred years earlier is also good for the same reason, even if horses and riders are alike absurdly untrue to Nature.

Great Art is not necessarily accurate. Its first characteristic, whether Greek or Gothic, is not a sense of proportion, or a knowledge of anatomy and perspective, but width and depth of vision, insight into application, and courage in facing and compromising with technical difficulties; and we, if we are to train ourselves to be artists, must learn to imitate, not so much the greatest achievements of past Art, as the processes, or rather traditions, by the help of which these achievements were attained. See what hope there is in the careless confidence of that archaic work before the critic's advent! What easy assurance! Qualities which are only too apt to be wanting in maturer work, when the intention of the whole is often sacrificed to the elaboration of details, and the artist forgets, in his picture of Hercules, that the hero's heart is stronger than his muscles.

The true meanings of Naturalism and Realism, as applied to Art, must not be, as they too often are, confounded. They are really very distinct. Realistic Art aims at reproducing the delusion of Nature, external, physical Nature, as far as possible. Naturalistic Art infers a deliberate selection of certain characteristics or conditions in Nature, for their reduction to an intentional and decorative purpose, and Tradition is the history of the best ways of doing this.

When the leaves are falling in autumn the realist makes a "picture" of the scene: brown leaves fluttering across the grey sky, and lying helpless on the greensward. The picture may be pretty, but to the mind of the decorator it does not sufficiently emphasise the essential fact, and all the feelings it conjures up for him. The

realist must paint what he sees, and no more than he sees. In doing so, he exercises no more remarkable virtue than fidelity to the task he has set himself. But the naturalist or decorator will tell at other times, and in different ways, with greater freedom because with more concentrated feeling, how the trees wept, and the rooks sailed home; and perhaps in prim diaper paint a sad semé of despondent leaves on a forlorn ground. The labour of the realist may be valuable as a record, and perhaps useful occasionally to the artist himself in the light of practice and experience, but it is seldom Art. He has no monopoly of Nature, and has only heralded the coming of greater conventions and wider traditions. He has perhaps enlarged our field of experience and sown a rich crop, but he has not harvested it. That remains for us to do; and when we feel overwhelmed by the technical triumphs of past great periods we must remember that their conditions differed from our own, and cannot be repeated, and that the new experiences which are ours entail new problems and new chances of excellence. But immediate proficiency is impossible, because we have no traditions to build on.

A great work of Art is never accomplished by the unaided efforts of a single artist. No one alone, by virtue of his own strength, can ever wrest from the chaos of the universe even a temporary solution of its mysteries. Slowly, and with extreme care, men have collected a few ideas in the past, and founded some sort of tradition or working hypothesis to save us from despair. However scanty the hypothesis may eventually prove, it would be madness to neglect it, even if it were possible to do so, because it is all we have to go upon; but if we obey tradition, though our beginnings may be crude and archaic, like all noble beginnings, our work will be strong and lasting.

The invention of the steam-engine, with its effect on civilisation, was, without doubt, the final cause of the suppression of genuine manufacture; and design as a fine art, in its dependence on handicraft, yielded to pictorial or imitative art. But neither mechanical symmetry nor resemblance to nature makes art good, but only the artist's realisation of what his imagination bodies forth; and though that is necessarily the greatest art which has the greatest knowledge of

things, it is not the knowledge of their forms which makes it great, but insight into the part in life those forms can be made to play. To draw a flower well we must love flowers; to draw birds we must feel their flight, and long to fly; to draw a lion we must understand the dignity of his irresistible strength; and to draw a man we must know a little, perhaps, of human nature; and so we shall never succeed in teaching Art till we insist on its utter dependence on our imaginative affection, and the elaborate technical education given to students is wasted so long as we presume to teach the principles of Art as if they were dogmas of religion, or the theories of exact sciences.

We cannot learn to draw till we have learned to feel. That, perhaps, cannot be taught in any school, but its absolute importance should never be forgotten there. All talk and teaching of Art is useless whilst it echoes the prevailing folly of the time—the insane effort to discover salvation in scientific theories. Talk of a change of style! It is only a change of heart that will save us. The mere revival of handicraft cannot redeem Art, any more than diplomatic policy and ingenious economy can pull a nation out of its decline: it only shelves the question. Nothing is really done till it is done with enthusiasm; nothing in Art unless it is spontaneous, unless its tradition or style is the unmistakable symbol of feeling. If a renaissance of Art is still possible for us, it must not only be in spite of, and in protest against, the habit of thought which is exclusively intellectual; it must not only struggle in direct opposition to machinery, which is the outward expression of that habit; but it must be besides the carrier of a message and an angel of good tidings.

It is popular to deny that Art can have any mission. The a-morality of Art has become a catchword and commonplace—the last stronghold of a prevalent anarchy. Art nevertheless has a message which it will only tell to those who, daring to trust in the sacredness of sense, can see through sense to where body and soul are reconciled. The traditions of Art have been lost because the traditions of humanity have been neglected, and the significance of its legends

despised. No tree has borne for us apples of knowledge we might dare to pick; no hero with a deathless pain steals fire from heaven and beckons us back to Eden. The new art and the new criticism know better than that! Their motto is "Vanity," and they prefer honest dirt to passing sunshine. But our traditions and legends are not really dead and done for, but are eternal and the only facts for us. They do not blink the dirt, but transform it into gold by alchemy of Art. The traditional methods of Art are the steps by which we finally climb to the proper representations of human traditions—those fables which turn children into philosophers and philosophers into children. As children and philosophers we shall once again begin to feel their influence, and open our hearts to their wisdom.

The following essay is a humble attempt to arrange in some sort of sequence the methods I have myself found fruitful of significance and development. It will not help any student of art to compete successfully with designers of wall-papers, printed calicoes, or any other machine-aided and incongruous compromise; nor will it assist him to prostitute his talent for manufacturers whose appreciation of Art is limited to its power of advertising themselves. My object is to assert that the art of designing is not based on the physical analysis of Nature, but follows a classification of its own, none the less exact because it is synthetic and imaginative.

Nor would I venture to put forward any scheme which was not confirmed by the practice of the past, and ratified by the judgment and appreciation of friends; and the utmost I can hope for is that some abler hand will prune away the dead wood from my little tree, and transplant its heart into a nobler garden and more fruitful soil.



THE waving line, or zigzag, is a form of ornament that occurs, openly or in disguise, in the arts of all nations and of all times. It appears to be a mode of motion, a gesture or an expression in every kingdom and scale of life. The wind, the waves, and the clouds take its form; so does the very grass under our feet. Science can demonstrate it. History repeats it. It is illustrated by the lowest forms of matter, and the highest forms of thought: as much in the poet's metre as in the worm's coil. Instinctively, or with conscious intent, the tide of life rises and ebbs, advances and recoils, hopes and despairs.

Nature offers us forces and facts. As we watch the waves by the seashore, we cannot help noticing the regularity of their advance, the ordered furrows they plough in the sand, and the "engrailed ordinary" of foam and weed they leave behind. The print of our footsteps repeats the same pattern, and echoes the hesitation of our march along the sands of time. The position of the buds on every twig we gather from the hedge follows the same law, and yields abundant evidence that all life is controlled by the same force. So that not alone the facts, but the force which is behind the facts, constitute the materials on which Art is based.

This line, which henceforward we shall call the spiral, is the simplest representation of the force that not only governs the huge ordering of the elements, but weaves itself inextricably into the

actual shape of the humblest and the noblest possessors of life. It is, in consequence, the first and most common symbol of energy and life, and therefore the clue to all true design.

If we may symbolise energy or force by a waving line or zigzag, a spot will best stand for the actual fact, considered apart from its vital principle. A curved line and a spot, the former the symbol of force, the latter the symbol of fact! They correspond to the ideal and real, to poetry and prose, to dynamic and stationary. They mix, in greater or less proportion, in all art of any importance. The spiral is the trunk of the tree of life, dead without its facts of leaves and fruit; and the leaves themselves cannot live if they lose the trunk's support, but fall to the ground in yellow and sapless decay.

Though the spiral is itself, as we shall see, an enormous factor in the course of the tradition we are going to pursue, it is often apparently absent from a design, in the same way as the trunk of



Fig. 1.

the tree may be completely hidden under the mass of the foliage, or as the linen ground of a piece of embroidery is lost behind the needlework that covers it, but it is none the less present in intention and spirit, disposing and regulating all. Here, for instance (fig. 1), is an elementary form of ornament, but one that will sufficiently illustrate my meaning. It is little more than a random row of spots, or blobs, whose decorative value depends almost entirely on the order in which they are placed, and the relative sizes of the intervals between them. If you could change these meaningless blobs into the men and horses of a Greek frieze, you would at once understand the value and necessity of that order and relation. But the laws that govern the disposition of the members in the noblest work of Art, are the same that set these spots in their proper order. This order and relation are the spiral in disguise; so that it is necessary, before we do anything else, to understand the spiral, and the nature of its application.

The idea of a spiral is usually associated with the involved coil of a shell, or the volute of an Ionic capital; but the term applies to any aspect of the curve familiarly known to us as the screw, of which a zigzag with rounded corners is, perhaps, the simplest example; and I prefer to take this curved line instead of the more rigid zigzag, because the transitions of Nature are generally more gradated than sudden, and because, as Ruskin has said, curves are to straight lines what gradations are to colour, so that the first necessity of beauty in line is curvature. There is no such thing as a straight line in Nature. All really straight-line work has to be done with rulers, and is therefore geometrical, unnatural and inartistic. The zigzag moulding of a Norman arch owes its charm to a naïve rejection of all mathematical assistance, and becomes hopefully curved at the angles. It is consequently more an example of an extreme form of spiral than a demonstration of the æsthetic value of straight lines.

So let us at once hand over our rulers to the carpenters and engineers, and remember that we are dealing with the facts of Art and not with the problems of arithmetic. It may be a fine thing to be able to draw a straight line, but all the books of Euclid will not help us to paint with greater expression. The necessary control of the pencil may be quite satisfactorily acquired by practising the hand in the work it will finally have to delight in.

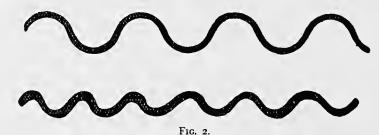
A mathematical pattern is always a bad pattern; bad because uninteresting. Let us rid our minds of the idea that there is any abstract virtue in Art apart from expression. Expression is the all-in-all of every kind of Art, patterns included. If your pattern is not interesting, have nothing to do with it. You can only blunt your own feelings, and add to the confusion of others, by retaining it.

There are some patterns which at first sight seem to depend on straight lines, and which we should be sorry to entirely neglect. Many handicrafts and trades—such as bricklaying, basket-making, and chair-caning—suggest a large number of varied and interesting patterns necessarily constructed on straight lines; but the delightful results that can be obtained with vari-coloured bricks depend on their being treated *en masse* as a large kind of mosaic, when an approximate

resemblance to curved form can be obtained. In basket-making and its kindred handicrafts the charm is found in the constant, though slight, deviation from the straight, and in that feeling of interlacing which finds its final and completest realisation in the mysteries of the loom.

We will now get to know the simplest form of the spiral thoroughly well, and learn how to distinguish it from the falsely accurate spiral of modern manufacture.

Here (fig. 2) are two spirals. You will think at first that the top one is eminently more satisfactory than the one below it, which looks like a weak and badly drawn imitation of it. The former is measured with compasses, and is sufficiently accurate to be quite uninteresting, and artistically bad. Of the second one, you will notice at once that it might have been drawn in a hundred different ways,



each one of which would have suited our purpose equally well. The number of spirals that may be drawn with circle and ellipse is large, but necessarily limited; the number that can be drawn by the hand alone infinite; and the most precious ones are those which it would be the most difficult to imitate with mathematical instruments. Hence, to acquire a mathematical habit of hand is to acquire the least desirable attainment for drawing a good spiral.

The great point of difference between these two spirals is, that while in the "accurate" one the variations from the straight are identically the same, in the other no two curves are alike. It is important to notice this, because if the irregular one were in any way meant to be based on a mathematical ideal, these inaccuracies would sufficiently condemn it. But on what basis is this wayward spiral of ours, which we have taken in some sort as a type, established?

What does it represent? Of what is it a copy? Of any particular spiral anywhere? No; but of all spirals everywhere, none of which are mathematically correct. So that the ideal or typical spiral must not be a mathematical one, because mathematical accuracy is not a common quality of spirals, but one which they all unite in contradicting. Our typical spiral, therefore, must be inaccurate in the same sense that Nature is inaccurate, with the feeling or instinct that all growth or motion is varied or uncertain; and with the confession that we understand that uncertainty, and sympathise with it.

If you look again at these two spirals, you will see that there is no marked tendency in either to get thick at one end, so that it is impossible to determine in which direction they are intended to run, if they are meant to run at all. But while in the one the same thickness is retained throughout, I have tried to make the other more robust in some parts than in others; not with undue emphasis, but varying, as Nature and character vary.

There is certainly more in this crooked line than we were at first sight inclined to suppose. Wayward and uneven as it is, is it not a fairer picture of life than a thing drilled and cramped, without vitality, ambition, or hope? Let us then throw our compasses after the rulers, and learn to trust to our own instincts, and that finest achievement of mechanism, the human arm.

I will recapitulate the salient characteristics of the true spiral, because they necessarily relate to all that follows. They are mainly negative. You are not to draw the spiral with mathematical instruments. You are not to try and draw any two curves of it exactly alike. You are not to try and make it of the same thickness throughout; but you are to make it vigorous, subtle, and living. That is to say, you are not to try to make a machine of yourself; and you are to try to express as much feeling in a line as you can put into one. In learning to draw, you can be told what to avoid. What to do, or rather how to do it, everyone must learn for himself.

I would not detain you so long over this elementary stage in design, if I did not feel how necessary it is to assert that decoration, or design, is based on an emotional, and not on a merely intellectual,

convention. Your text-books invariably suppose that ornament is natural fact, arranged on geometrical principles to suit rapid and repetitive manufacture. It is nothing of the kind. If your natural facts are arranged with feeling, your design will be a good one; but they cannot be arranged with feeling if they are arranged geometrically. There is a noble convention, and an ignoble convention. The nature of the former is that it constantly disobeys, and gives the lie to, geometry; of the latter, that it tamely obeys it. There is one rigid law, however, that every spiral must obey: up and down it must go; right, left, right, left,—no marching can be done otherwise. It would spoil our little pattern to break off anywhere, and to go off on strike, for an inch or so, before we returned to the ranks; but within this broad, but strict rule, considerable latitude is allowed. And so long as we march in step, we may march as we please, with earnest conversation, or lusty light-hearted song.

The spiral I have drawn above is, in spite of its shortcomings, the central type of all spirals. The tradition of Art constitutes a chain of links, and each link in the chain is not only the descendant and heir of all the previous links, but is the parent of all that follow. Each link is also the centre of a large group of dependent links, of which it is the type. Each member of each group shares in the privileges of the central type, so that at every step we take the advantage or knowledge we have already gained increases in geometrical ratio. Here, for instance, is our original spiral, our Aaron's rod, which we shall see bud in various ways. If we can make it do so in ten different ways, we shall possess a fund of ten different patterns; but if we first determine ten different sorts of spiral, instead of only one, our fund is increased ten times ten, and we shall have a hundred different patterns at our disposal; at the next step a thousand, and so on.

That is the main idea of the development and evolution of traditional ornament; but no science, especially one based on the imagination, is capable of being restrained within rigid boundaries, and our law will often, consequently, be more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The dogmas of tradition are flexible ones,

and must be enforced as lightly and delicately as possible, or the chain will either imprison us or break in our endeavours to be free; and though I lay special stress on the initial value of the spiral, you must not imagine I want to assert infallibility for my selection of it. It is a clue to much, not necessarily to all, nor is it indeed the only clue. Others will occur to us, which will be serviceable in their own place and time.

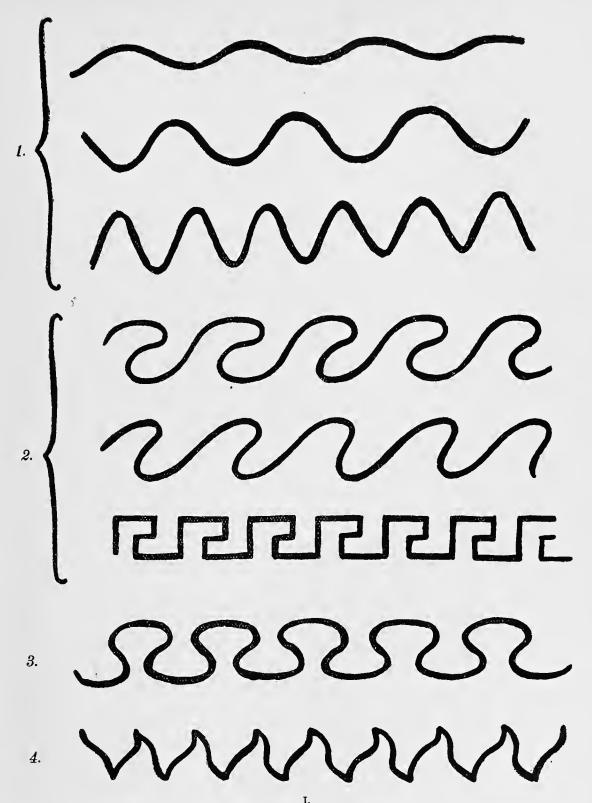
Systems for teaching Art, or anything else for the matter of that, are only convenient makeshifts, or temporary explanations for practical purposes of phenomena that for ever remain insoluble. Nature is wider than any system. She is a drama, and your petty system nothing more than a ticket to view the performance. Some seats are better than others, but wherever we are, we can at best obtain only a partial view of the stage. At this point, however, the analogy ceases, for the play-goer watches the piece from beginning to end; but what can we, who have come late and must go early, tell, from the short glimpse that is allowed us, of the plot of the universe? And if we discover that the Art of the present day is worse than it was two thousand years ago, what is that but a proof of the inadequacy of a system based on either scientific or historical researches? For proficiency in Art is quite irrespective of proficiency in these matters, and can only be got by methods and examples that will appeal to the imagination of every race and time. Our feelings, instincts, affections, passions, as we may choose to call them, do not alter, or only imperceptibly. They are infallible guides in matters of Art, and no system will succeed that is not based on their justice, and does not appeal to their verdict.

The first link in our chain of tradition, the staple on which all the rest hangs, is the spiral—a line bent into more or less regular and similar curves. We will conceive it as a single line drawn with pencil or brush; as thin or as thick as you please, and in any way you like, but essentially a line, and not a curved space enclosed by lines. It is also to stand as a type; that is to say, we must not associate it with any particular degree of curvature. It is not like a circle, which ceases to be a circle if you alter the relation of any

one part to another. It is, on the contrary, capable of being pulled out or contracted without in the least losing its prime character as spiral; and since we can define it as the effect of more or less parallel forces, acting alternately in an up-and-down direction, and more or less vertically on a straight line, we shall be able to produce other kinds of spirals according to the direction and strength of the forces, and their distances apart (Plate I.). Thus, besides the two extremes of elongation into a scroll and compression into a zigzag, we have our typical spiral, which we may consider symbolical of the vegetable world from its suggestion of vegetable growth; a second more suggestive of waves than vegetables; a third which has been taken by the heralds, and called "Nebulæ," and is therefore emblematical of sky, clouds, and air; and a fourth, which seems at first sight more of a zigzag than a spiral, for it has a sharp angle in it, but you will see that its charm depends on the double curve in each up-and-down stroke, so that it became a line of flames, and will typify for us the touching of formal design with the sacred fire of emotion, and properly complete our series, so that we are able to base our four primary spirals on the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire.

The second, or wave spiral, is unfortunately better known to us in its common and square form. It is known then as the Greek fret or key pattern, and when it is drawn sensitively becomes a noble and venerable symbol; but in the modern and architectural form in which we meet it so often to-day, it means nothing at all except the vulgarity of cheap building and cheaper ornament, and the lasting difference between the rigid and stencilled dogmatism of an art which is only intellectual, and the freedom of what is natural and instinctive.

You will see at a glance that the examples in Plate I. are but a few of the many spirals that we can invent, and that a vast number of patterns can be derived from them. It is not within the scope of my present intention to more than suggest the possibility of simple and yet pleasant designs that the different arrangement of these lines alone will make; you will find plenty of examples of their use, not only in museums, but in many of the necessary handicrafts that still exist.



I. EARTH SPIRALS.

2. WATER SPIRALS.

3. AIR SPIRALS.

4. FIRE SPIRALS.

Your own observation and ingenuity will now easily invent many more, and if you add the charm of colour, a vast field of somewhat archaic ornament is in your possession. But it is best not to lay too much stress on forms of decoration that may tend to become too abstract. A child's mind will delight in instances of linear repetition and complexity before it is capable of appreciating the artistic use of such a natural form as a leaf, and we must therefore allow him free scope to exercise his ingenuity and fancy in this direction as much as he likes, for which his subsequent work will be all the richer. But the practice should not be made obligatory, because as a final form of decorative pattern, except in very subordinate places, such a primitive form of Art as mere intricacy of lines must fail to satisfy us.

The savage has little more sense of the decorative application of natural objects than the child. His lines of linear ornament may be charming in their way, but can hardly serve as exemplary patterns to us, who, whatever our artistic short-comings may be, have learnt to expect larger sympathies and wider acquaintance with Nature. But as the groundwork on which most, if not all, of subsequent ornament is built, the study of pure line, and simple and innocent examples of its exclusively decorative treatment, is eminently necessary; and though as we become more observant of natural forms, and more desirous of representing them, we run the risk of losing this sense of delight in the decorative power of a mere line, as also in the crude division and contrast of masses of colour merely for their own sake, still it remains certain that if our art does not contain this more or less abstract and arbitrary element, it has lost its backbone and its main claim to the name of design. The noblest Art exhibits the finest union of the abstract and the concrete. It is because we must base our facts on fancy, our realisms on unreality, that the study of convention becomes of vital importance.

The popular mistake consists in supposing that this element of unreality can be adequately represented by geometrical figures, on the ground that the more archaic and abstract forms of Art bear some resemblance to a geometrical arrangement. If these primitive forms of Art, however, possess any æsthetic value—and they are not

supposed to be entirely deficient in that quality—it is just because they refuse to obey geometrical exactness, and differ from it in the same way that our spiral differs from the mathematical one. It is the unreal, the conventional basis of Art, which is the imaginative and valuable part of it. What sort of a national and traditional design, do you think, could possibly spring from the laws of arithmetic, and steam-engines? Children and nations in progressive stages of civilisation delight in a form of Art that is little more than the intricacies of pure lines, but the pleasure it gives has nothing in common with figures or logic. The early Art of the Scandinavians affords an instance of this, for in spite of good examples of quite matured and naturalistic Art, in the coins of the Roman Empire, which were in their possession, they preferred to alter the sedate portraits and effigies of classical civilisation into coils of twisted dragon and rope; and a somewhat similar, though less marked change, took place over the whole of Europe during its dark ages, and is proof, not of the absence of imaginative power, but of its presence, and intensely significant of the fact that we must judge all Art primarily by the virility of the imagination it displays, and not by its knowledge of fact. In the Scandinavian imagination twisted dragons and involved ropes were more potent facts than portraits of Consuls and Emperors. And therefore, as completely illustrating their state of mind, the decoration on Scandinavian buckles and fibulæ, and the intricacies of Irish illumination, are perfect Art, but by no means, except in a subordinate position, perfect for us. Interesting, and characteristic of strong feeling as they are, we must look askance on the examples of them in our possession. represent, as it were, the North Pole of Art, an excess of abstraction with a minimum of fact. We must be careful to avoid the frost of its fascination. It has no direct outlet, or further evolution. It is, after all, a cul de sac, a catacomb, which it is exciting to enter and instructive to trace, but as it has no especial exit, we must return to the entrance if we wish to continue our road.



WHEN Ariadne gave Theseus a clue to escape the confusion of the Cretan labyrinth, the direction it took exactly reproduced the windings of the maze and solved the deadly riddle of its intricacy. The myth had intense significance for the Greek, and wide influence on his art; and with or without a contemporaneous analogy in literature, the same feelings that this story tells still inspire the artist who follows his craft for the expression of his deeper thoughts and more mysterious instincts. But not to go too deep for our reasons, the mere delight in tracing and twisting ropes and ribbons, the manufacture of nets and snares, the rigging of ships, the mechanism of the loom, the coiling and arrangement of the hair, the following of unknown paths and winding ways, have all a symbolical interest for us, and always find a ready echo in an instinctive form of decoration.

The spiral, as we discussed it in the last chapter, is sternly simple for the sake of its subsequent developments, but there is another form of it which is released from such responsibility, and delights in many forms of complexity. In this form it is useful and invigorating so long as it expresses that delight, not in a puppy-like way for the sake of boisterous confusion, but for a human and orderly pride in tracing a difficulty to its source, or in carrying an arduous enterprise to its end.

The principle on which this class of pattern is based is the

involution of one or more lines in a more or less elaborate or puzzling fashion, but a fashion that shows evidence of intention and purpose, or, in other words, of design. If we want to make a labyrinth we must never lose sight of the clue, or else our design and ourselves may be lost. The condition of excellence in this class of decoration, as indeed of excellence in all Art, is to produce the greatest result, or impression, with the least evidence of laborious effort. Plate II. sufficiently illustrates the character of this class of ornament. If you enjoy tracing the involution of these examples, you will be able to make other labyrinths of the same kind, and get pleasantly involved and extricated. But do not attempt to invent them unless you thoroughly enjoy the exercise. Your enjoyment of them is essential to their success. Conscientiousness is fatal to Art if it is allowed to usurp the place of irresponsible spontaneity.

When there is an evident continuity of line we may call these spirals rope spirals. There are chain spirals too. These consist of distinct but connected links, and do not, as a form of flat decoration, possess an equal charm, though in the special arts of the smith, mason, and wood-carver their possible variations attain tremendous importance. As a final form of decorative pattern a chain spiral has distinct limits of interest for us. Much later on in the unfolding of our tradition we shall find it immensely serviceable; its links will then become the ordered and united frames of inserted symbols instead of the fetters which at present they suggest.

These rope and chain patterns constitute a group about our first spiral. Their charm springs, as we have seen, from their success in realising a particular set of feelings. But the state of mind they represent is a puzzled and introspective one. There is little evidence of that intimate sympathy with the shapes of actual things and animals which has become rightly associated in our minds with Art of any high excellence. By themselves they cannot long satisfy us as final forms of decoration. But without their help little of the human and vigorous ornament would be possible. With this in our minds we can return to the direct chain of tradition, and the development of our first spiral.

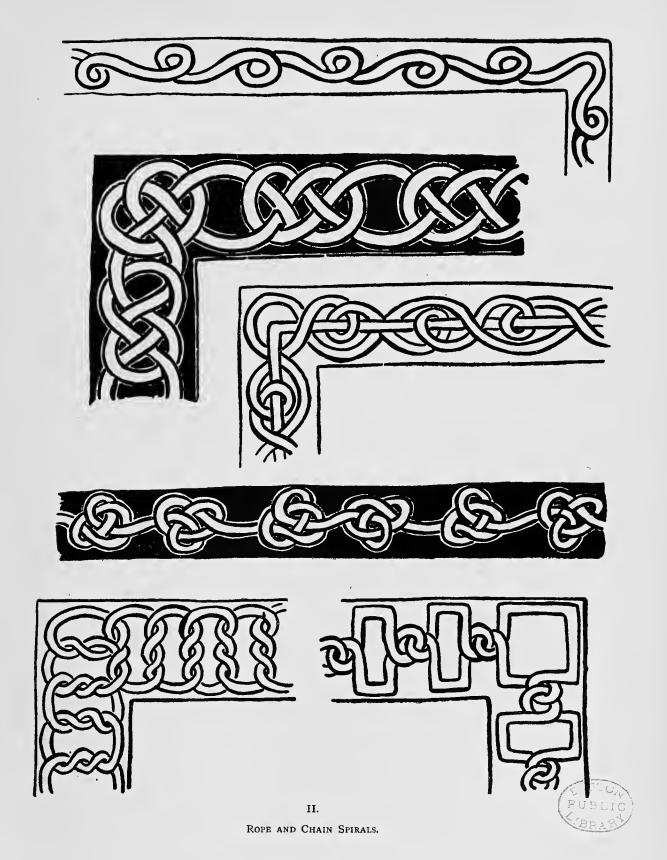
While this is still little more than a waving line representative merely of a sense of passionate feeling or sensitive arrangement, let us connect it with that other primitive factor of Art in our possession, the spot or blot; and here (fig. 3) is, you see, their first and evident connection. Much of our later work is only the tracing of the variation, and the possible development, of this simple and innocent theme.

In the example before us, if we take it as a type, we can vary the curve and thickness of the spiral, as well as the size and shape of the spots. But if the line of life is strong in ourselves, we cannot proceed far without feeling how unsatisfactory it is to deal with abstractions only, and that so long as the spiral is only a line, though a thick one, and the spot only a blot, however black, their reference to the homely body and soul of nature is vague and incomplete. And as soon as the spiral becomes too broad, and the spots too large



to be manageably represented by one stroke or touch, of however broad and sensitive a tool, it will become necessary to enforce their now apparent solidity with an outline.

This is a more important change than at first sight appears. It involves the conception of a superficies, of two dimensions instead of only one. For so long as a system of decoration is based on only lines and dots, it is necessarily savage and metaphysical; but as soon as a line is drawn with the intention of enclosing a space—as soon, in fact, as it is an outline—it becomes a natural instead of an artificial symbol, and opens the whole of Nature to the use of Art. If we now proceed to cautiously trace this change, we shall first see the spiral itself thickening at regular intervals into excrescences of conscious shape, though at present obtaining them by mere thickness of single lines, and giving us a new series of ornamental borders (Plate III.) of varying value and interest. And in the same



way we shall see the spot next become a self-conscious mass, or solid space, the potential symbol of anything in heaven above or in the earth and water below. Crude symbol enough, no doubt, at first, while we are still children, but growing in power and significance, as we grow ourselves in observation and intelligence.

Here, indeed, begins what is generally understood by the Art of drawing: the Art, namely, of representing things, degraded now into the business of copying them. Even the true representation of a thing is not in itself worthy of the name of Art till we have learned to subordinate it to some rhythmical intention, or scheme of design, of which the spiral is the simplest type. No doubt the tendency at the present time is to cultivate this power of drawing things, that is to say, of imitating their appearance, too exclusively, and without sufficient reference to that instinct of rhythmical relation which alone can make them decorative and useful. But so long as that necessary subordination is insisted on, every approximation to greater natural truth of external outline is an advantage, and should be cultivated. So that at this stage in our tradition a vast field of pattern is opened to us, by drawing lines of all sorts of things in simple sequence, or by placing them sensitively in the intervals of a spiral. But the objects thus placed must necessarily, at present, be simple ones. Nothing can be more beautiful than the frank innocence of a line of animals, if a Greek has drawn them; but we must not forget that it is one thing to draw animals with fair accuracy, and quite another to arrange and draw a line of them as harmoniously as a Greek could. Any one of average talent may learn to do the former; but it wants a Greek training to manage the latter comfortably.

Without anticipating such a proficiency, we ought to notice here how the consciousness of this new power of representing things instead of thoughts—or, rather, spaces instead of lines—first expresses itself, and the importance and the legitimacy of the patterns and borders in which it exercises its new-found gifts. The feeling that inspires these patterns is still innocent of resemblance to forms of known things, but is evidently groping after them, often with a naïve simplicity that is almost amusing. For instance, the last pattern but

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INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENTS OF THE SPIRAL AND THE SPOT.

one on Plate III. is taken from an early Greek vase, and represents more or less vaguely in the artist's mind who did it a phalanx of Greek warriors. He had no particular desire or intention of copying the soldiers; all he felt was that they and his pattern had somehow or other to obey the same marching orders if they wished to satisfy the requirements of their position. In many cases it is difficult to say whether these patterns are spirals derived from the undulatory line, or friezes derived from the original row of spots, or from a natural sliding of one into the other; nor is it necessary to decide such a minor point of tradition when their decorative character is so obvious.

The Greek artist had a supreme sense of order and relation, and therefore we find his art a development of the frieze more than the spiral. The spiral in a Greek frieze may be said to be latent. But the Greek artist can draw the spiral by itself as well, and draw it perfectly, so perfectly that it is almost mechanical, and certainly uninteresting. That is only too often the characteristic of subordinate Greek decoration. It is too perfect. It lacks the naïve uncouthness of the Christian spiral. The Christian inherited the spiral from the Greek, but he conceived it in an entirely different way. aspiration had entered the world, and it became impossible to regard anything from a purely abstract and impersonal point of view. The spiral itself was treated as a thing of life, and entered integrally into the whole conception of Art. This welding of the abstract with the concrete, of higher with lower life, of imaginative order with material fact, is the basis of Christian Art, and forms its necessary tradition. It is therefore as imprudent to study individual forms at the sacrifice of their conventional arrangement, as it is to lose ourselves exclusively in the labyrinths of Scandinavian imagination. A really progressive tradition maintains the just balance between both points of view. Great powers and a keen sense of rhythm tempted the Greek artist to neglect the visible sign of conventional treatment. He despised the spiral, and finally fell because of his neglect. He got it into his head that painting and sculpture were fine arts to be pursued for their own sake. We have made the same disastrous mistake. For the aim of Art is to make a useful thing beautiful as well as

useful; and the use of tradition is to teach us the best way of doing it. And here (Plate IV.) are some examples to illustrate what I have been saying. The first is a specimen of the purely abstract Greek spiral, which, whatever its origin, cannot now be said to resemble any natural foliage whatever. The second and third are Greek friezes of high quality. In the second only a few noughts and crosses remain of the spiral, which the artist is already learning to despise. The third is entirely naturalistic. The fourth is late Gothic, but shows well enough for our purpose the union of the two motives, though the Christian artist has neither the facility nor the education of the Greek.

You remember what I said in the last chapter, that a pattern must be interesting, and you probably thought it at the time a somewhat unnecessary truism; but can you point to many examples of everyday art of modern manufacture that you treasure on account of the imaginative delight their patterns give you? And yet the most effective decoration is generally the simplest, as the articles it decorates should be the least expensive. What manufacturers delude you into paying for is elaboration, but you must never mistake this for Art. The praise of elaboration is merely an excuse for creating a fictitious value in things where the imagination is conspicuously absent. greatest works of art are remarkable for careless ease and rapid simplicity. All evidence of trouble is painful. The timid and laborious insipidity of modern decoration has so atrophied our instinct for really pretty things that many of us who ought to know better are apt to be startled into disapprobation of strong idiosyncrasy, and prefer to shelter ourselves behind orthodox commonplace rather than run any risk of being considered guilty of bad taste. This is unpatriotic, because it is our duty, as far as we can, to encourage original work, and to try to understand it, even if it strikes us as uncommon; for genius is after all only the expression of strong individuality.

There is a quality which the popular idea of tradition never credits it with, to which we must nevertheless call attention here, because it is a very salient one. This is the quality of unexpectedness.

People think that tradition is a collection of cut and dried rules, instead of a storehouse for every recognised method of giving delight. We are all of us essentially children, to be kept out of mischief by new toys. Art is the great minister to the pleasures of innocence, and if it forgets to please, if its traditions have lost the faculty of originality, or the power of constantly giving us new impressions, it can no longer be the living, efficient influence in our lives that it ought to be, but a tool in the hands of interested persons, a bogey for the priest and a fetish for the theorist. There are few dangers more insidious than that of treating Art from too serious a point of view, so that I should like to give you a few examples, even at this early stage, of what I have called unexpectedness. To lead the mind to expect an ordinary sequence—a natural climax, to interrupt the anticipated development, and to continue with a motive which has no apparent connection with the plot, to maintain the integrity of the whole nevertheless, is a manœuvre that has undeniable claims on popularity, and is what every real artist wishes to do sometimes.

In our own art of decoration perhaps the simplest method of producing such an effect is to treat an outline which is naturally associated in our minds with one inevitable set of ideas, not as the vehicle of those ideas at all, but of others, which at first sight seem to have no connection with them. There are, for instance, certain shapes which have become traditionally capable of being used independently of the facts they were originally intended to represent. Such traditional shapes occur in the cross, the shield, and the vase. You may take certain traditional shapes of these symbols and use them as backgrounds to draw things on which at first sight present no features in common with enjoyment, defence, or self-sacrifice. The ultimate value of your use of them, however, depends on the subtlety of their implied connection.

In a subsequent chapter we will treat more systematically of some of the most important of these traditional shapes. But there is one manner of achieving the quality of unexpectedness which occurs at this early stage in the traditions of Art, and is one which I am glad to illustrate here, because it will help us to understand a little more









GREEK AND GOTHIC TRADITION.

clearly the real meaning of conventionalism in Art, and how it involves the use of a natural, spontaneous or poetic symbolism of far wider extent and greater influence than the rigid and ecclesiastical one. For instance, in rightly conventional Art the outline or picture of a dog is not intended to represent either your terrier or my greyhound, but to stand for the qualities that make both our pets faithful and gluttonous. The great artist or seer never loses sight of this natural symbolism. He is therefore primarily an outliner and colourist, and does not particularly trouble himself about little tricks of tones and shadows and textures, which merely emphasise the peculiarities of individuals and the accidents of transitory effects. In the same way the spiral is at heart only a symbol of feeling, though it has become by now associated, however vaguely, with the idea of a distinct thing, and it will be an instance of this quality of unexpectedness to treat it in a way that is really quite consistent with the character we have given it. Thus, by indefinitely increasing its width without altering its direction, we shall be able to draw things inside the spiral, whose meaning must be considerably influenced by their extraordinary position (Plate V.). In fact, there is sure to be here some connecting feeling in the artist's mind between the spiral and the things he draws inside it, which will enhance the spectators' pleasure, but which it is not necessary he should understand. That connection may at times appear vague—it can hardly, perhaps, be put into words; but when it occurs in a happily spontaneous manner, it gives us a sensation or an atmosphere which no rigid symbol can by itself ever effect.

There is this difference between the old-fashioned or rigid symbolism, and the new or poetic: the former, by time-honoured association with certain feelings or ideas, may have become a useful medium for putting us *en rapport* with those feelings or ideas, but unless we were accustomed to such association would probably no more affect us than the gnostic symbols affect the person of average common sense. Poetic symbolism, on the other hand, is based on analogies between different things which our senses—those inlets into eternity, as Blake calls them—our senses of sound, sight, touch, taste,



THE SPIRAL USED AS A GROUND.

and smell can alone recognise. Consequently, while the old symbols are limited in number and arbitrary in nature, and must naturally tend to lose all value except a purely dogmatic one, the new symbols are infinite and everlasting, because they are based on an imaginative insight which has always been, and will always be, instinctive in every one who possesses it. There are, of course, some symbols, such as the Heart and the Cross, which will probably endure as fixed symbols; but even in instances of this sort, unless they are represented in a more suggestive manner than they are usually met with, their effect will be more to obscure than to open our susceptibilities to the emotions they are supposed to represent (fig. 4).

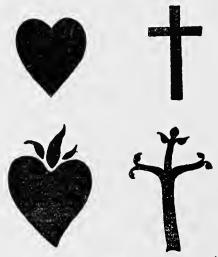


Fig. 4.

We have seen how Christian Art differs from Greek Art. By Christian Art I do not at all mean ecclesiastical or religious art, but art influenced by that feeling of imaginative affection which is associated with the best periods of our era. In this sense I prefer to call that feeling, when it is expressed in Art, Christian and not Gothic, because the qualities and characteristics of what is called Gothic art have been so thoroughly analysed that its spontaneous revival is now almost impossible; but few, I think, will maintain that the imaginative resources of Christianity have been entirely exhausted by the art of the middle ages, or even by the enlightened revelations of our own times. The principles of modern art, indeed,

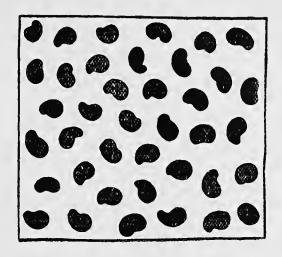
whether academic or impressionistic, appear but slightly connected with what we have called Christian tradition; they appeal to little beyond an objective or realistic standard. If the bones and muscles are all in their right places, and the tone of the twilight is exact, you ought to be satisfied, they think. But in the tradition of Christian art the imaginative includes the materialistic, and is not included by it, as the moderns would like us to suppose. No amount of anatomy, classical lore, or photography—however much you put the camera out of focus-can for a moment take the place of that imagination which is the all-in-all of Art. And do not by a mock modesty and subservience to Nature belie the powers of your own soul. There is no poetry in Nature; poetry only exists in the human mind that comprehends Nature, and if our imagination is greater than Nature, should we not obey it? Before we leave this part of our subject, let us review the three kinds of Art we have been engaged in considering. The Greek separates the unreal from the real, the spiral from the filling of its intervals. The former becomes in his hands graceful, mechanical, and uninteresting; the latter, so long as his decorative instinct is vivid, is unequalled in its own way in any time or art, and then falls into a mania of muscles and a delirium of drapery. Secondly, the Christian revives the spiral, as the symbol of his controlling imagination, and welds it into his science or knowledge of material facts. This is the only possible condition of a permanent tradition of Art. Thirdly, the modern or scientific school denies the pre-eminence of the decorative or imaginative faculty, and supposes that Art means picture-painting. Of course it is more or less arbitrary to draw any sharp distinctions between these three schools. A great many pictures make fine decoration; a great deal of decoration is as innocent of feeling as a photograph. The Greek is always right so long as he goes along Christian lines; that is to say, so long as his art is influenced by genuine feeling. We should recognise his real power better if a straddling gladiator, a weak-kneed Apollo, or an indecent Venus were not always in the way. Portraiture, which is an excellent and honourable accomplishment, invariably accompanies the final stages of a national art. It is the

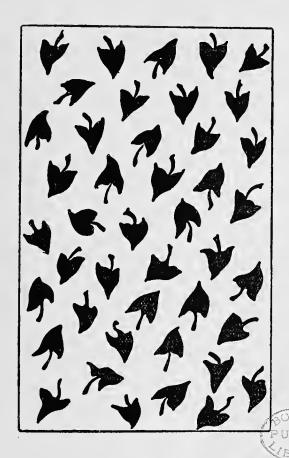
furthest removed from imaginative ideals, while the effort of this book is to establish the foundation, and not to put the coping-stone on tradition. It is wrong to draw any distinction between Art and Decoration. Decoration is Art. Great periods of art are those which can boast of great decorators; poor periods have poor decorators. The true history of Art follows the craftsman in his workshop, and shuns the fashionable studio.

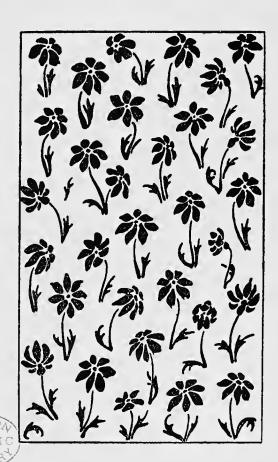
We must now leave the spiral for a little time, and follow an independent and subordinate source of ornament. This is the charm derived from a spotted or broken surface as opposed to a flat or smooth one. Putting aside the effect obtained by colour, any surface may be pleasantly broken by covering it, at more or less regular intervals, with some sort of spot or line. The pleasure obtained by this means is a very instinctive one, and a very natural one, if we are obliged to find a natural reason for everything we enjoy.

A starlit sky is a miracle of amazement still. A lawn sprinkled with crocuses, a copse starred with anemones, are homely instances of Nature decorated in this way. The charm of flowers and animals largely consists in the way in which they are spotted, flecked, or barred. Night alternates with day, winter with summer. The sky and the land are alike cross-hatched,—our country is a network of fields. Villages and hamlets sprinkle the spaces between the blots of larger towns. Each season as it comes blazons its coat with emblematic motley: the spring with blossom, the summer with rosebuds, the autumn with leaves of gold, the winter with flakes of snow.

I will class the various ways in which we recognise these phenomena and express our appreciation of them in Art under the name of Semé, because on the whole the instances of spotted or flecked things are more frequent and more interesting than striped and barred ones. Semé, or as some call it, Fleuré, may be considered as the extension of a line of spots to cover any given space. A space is well *semé* when it is delightfully dotted with a limited number of beautiful objects. You cannot anyhow make a good *semé* out of skulls and scarecrows, and twenty rosebuds are generally more effective than ten thousand.







SEMÉ.

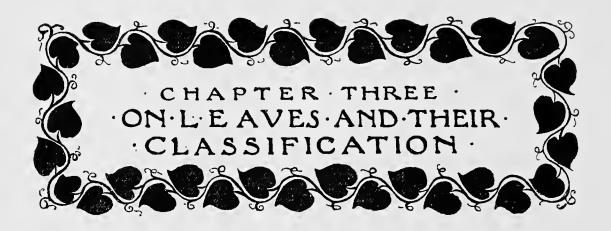
Next time the snow is falling look at it through one of your window-panes; the flakes only, against the leaden sky. Then take a piece of paper, and try and cover it with spots of any shape and size, at about the same distance from each other and as evenly as the snow-flakes. You must take care to avoid any mathematical arrangement, or your spots will run into lines and lozenges, and distress you like most wall-papers do. If you can cover your ground so satisfactorily that it would be difficult to take away a single spot without missing it, you will have made great progress in one of the most charming methods of decoration.

Let us suppose such a delicately spotted ground; only instead of spots or snow-flakes let us imagine a field *semé* properly with seeds (Plate VI.). Now, if you are a real magician, and can wield your pencil like a fairy's wand, you will be able to quicken this field of seeds into one of verdant leaves, or anon, into a garden of flowers.

If you want to see beautiful examples of meadows semé with flowers, go to South Kensington Museum and look at the Flemish tapestries there. They were woven at a time which may well be called civilised (if civilisation means a practical grip of what tends to make life full of beautiful interest), and illustrate, in an innocently pagan fashion, the consolations of Fame, and its triumph over Death, against which even "chastity" has proved unavailing. This it does by a series of processions embellished by the whole quaint profusion of Mediæval tradition. Into their merits as pictures we need not enter, but the fields through which these pageants pass must claim our utmost admiration. Here, unmoved by the temporary victory of any human ideal, springs every beautiful flower; and the Flemish master himself supplies the only possible commentary to his text, when he crowds the meadows with artfullest botany, and calls the careless grass to laugh at Fame from under the very chariot wheels of death. You may let your seeds grow into what you will, and so long as you keep them innocently small the effect will be charming. But if you have sown dragons' teeth, you may find considerable difficulty in marshalling your harvest. We shall have much more to say on this topic in a later chapter. The subject is a fascinating

one, and has tempted me to anticipate. But we must not allow the strong stream of tradition to carry us out of our depth. It is enough now to realise that the greatest Art is often no more than the noble expansion of a simple theme. The first use of Semé, the important one to us at present, is to show how to change a flat and uninteresting surface into a broken and interesting one, and to turn the empty ghosts of our newly discovered outlines into living and quaint-coated creatures. For with the outline of a thing before us, instead of as it were its silhouette in solid black, we shall naturally feel tempted to aim at a greater realisation of the thing it contains. And this temptation we must at present resist, and learn to cover our spaces in this new method we have learnt, as conventionally and evenly as possible, with only a clue in the selection of the pattern to the real thing it is a symbol of. For instance, the conventionalised outline of a bird, full of airy eyes, is an unmistakable and useful symbol of all spotted birds, and is surely better Art than the bad copy of a stuffed starling, over which we may have wasted many weary hours. Decorative Art classifies Nature in a way of her own; she will not let us see the full force of the fiery stripes on the tiger's flank, and forget the freaked jet on the pansy's cheek. Her classifications may appear capricious, but if she makes the lion lie down with the lamb, we may depend on it that there is a great truth in the partnership.

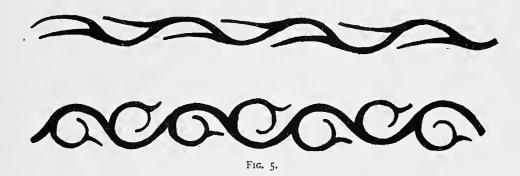
The tints of heraldry are represented by shading a white shield in different ways. Or is a semé of spots; sable, a diaper of crossed lines; and though no compromise can give the charm of colour, the constant gradation which is one of its qualities can be approximately rendered in this way. But we must never confuse colour with design. The utmost that colour can do is to enhance the feeling that the design creates. The art of designing, which is our immediate business, can only deal with lines and masses, and the feelings which lines and masses, and their different arrangements, will suggest.



N this chapter we shall continue to follow the further development of the spiral. We left it in potential infancy, already swelling like spring twigs at ruddy joints, ready to burst into verdant bud. We will let it do so, only noticing that for the present the spiral necessarily adopts a vegetable and earthy character in preference to one suggestive of sea or sky. This is not to be wondered at when we consider the greater variety and permanence of the experience we gather from our life on the soil, and the greater acquaintance and friendship with things which, like ourselves, claim a common and final home in the dust. To us the phenomena of sea and sky, if occasionally more stupendous, are less fixed and reliable than those of the land, and are consequently more apt to colour certain aspects of our Art than to direct its main tendency. The innocent but keenly marked zigzag of the young shoots of the thorn is happily of more frequent occurrence than the crooked fork of the lightning or the jagged edge of an angry wave. But if the spiral now gravely assumes the rôle of a tree or plant, it only does so to adopt what laws of vegetable growth will suit its more ubiquitous character, and blandly ignores what will not.

The first step of any importance that it takes is due to an equal development of the spiral line and of its interval spot, the two factors of the first spiral as illustrated in fig. 3. Let us take each of these separately. We have already seen the spiral showing a tendency to

swell at distinct points in its course (Plate III.). Its next action would evidently be to divide at those places and throw off separate shoots or subordinate spirals (fig. 5). A number of distinct patterns can be obtained in this way, but like the rope and the chain spirals they would soon show a tendency to become too abstract and too mechanical. We can appreciate them, but are probably too sophisticated to reproduce them ourselves. In undoubted Celtic hands they might be revived, but it seems to me questionable whether it is advisable to restore what would inevitably degenerate into an affected copy of past tradition, or possible to do so now, when the most disastrous instances of all sorts of realistic work find their way (in the shape of advertisements) into the remotest parts of the country,



and poison the native imagination there. The carved tombstones of the western Highlands are beautiful and fascinating; they display original genius of high quality, but it is original because it is untainted by the influence or example of foreign art, and springs direct from the people's own passionate heart. To revive it, we should first have to revive the religion or sentiment that gave it birth, and then build secluded monasteries for its practice.

And now we will turn to the independent action of the interval filling or spot. The first organic form that a spot or blot will naturally take is a leaf; the most common, the most varied, and yet the most simple of all forms. One adroit stroke of a good paint-brush will often produce the tolerable image of a leaf; it will, at any rate, so often suggest such a shape that a second stroke, to

more completely round its outline, with a final touch for the stalk, will confirm the likeness. Such a shape, at any rate, we will accept for the present as our type of leaf (fig. 6), and hasten to connect it with the simplest form of our sprouting spiral, and so get at once the first fully formed and completely satisfactory idea of a design, and one that contains the elements of reality and imagination, of



line and spot in duly balanced proportion (fig. 7). This is a most invaluable link in our chain of tradition, and the centre of a large group of examples.

Perhaps you thought the creation of our leaf trivial and childish. Childlike I hope it is. No traditional art can grow otherwise than in childlike fashion. Perhaps you think it would be more scientific to select from Nature what looks like a typical leaf and copy that



Fig. 7.

for our purpose; but that would contradict all our premises, if it did not simply beg the whole question. No natural fact becomes a type till we find its shape coincides with a previous idea in our own minds, or with some contour that the hand prefers instinctively to follow. In either case Nature does but ratify our choice. The typical leaf of one craft, however, is not necessarily the typical leaf of another; but in the basal art of designing, the greatest possible latitude is

given to the imagination, because its implements, pencil or brush, are the easiest to control. For this reason, designing holds the same relation to the various handicrafts that chemistry does to the natural sciences. It is the grammar of the Arts, and gives the broad laws or traditions which the others may vary but cannot alter. And this, if you will follow the matter home, is the only possible way of explaining how artistic types are selected. There is always an instinctive preference to be obeyed. The mind recognises and em, hasises what the hand is most inclined to do. The hand performs most easily, most instinctively, what is most often in the imagination. The whole system of traditional draughtsmanship is founded on this principle, and invites investigation; but at present we must treat more with how things can be arranged, than with how they are to be drawn.

With the deliberate acceptance of a leaf as the occupant of the spiral interval, I need not point out what an important point we have reached. For as soon as we touch nature with its immense fund of examples, the desire to elaborate and add to our repertory will prove irresistible, and some sort of classification useful if not necessary. A primer of scientific botany will not supply us with exactly the sort of classification we want. Science as yet has little respect for the sensuous and homely qualities of the things it attempts to describe. Their influence on the imagination, however, is supreme, and must be fully recognised in any system we adopt to further the cause of Art, for the object of Art is to appeal to the imagination. In such a system it is the most familiar things which will become the most important. The lark shall become our eagle, the daisy our lotus. Symbols cannot affect people to whom they are not native, nor any system or science interest us which does not ultimately rest on facts which we can all verify for ourselves. This will help us to understand why leaves take such a prominent position in every ornamental handicraft that is dependent on design. They commend themselves to us for their variety as well as their quantity. Their shapes glide smoothly into the interstices of our lines of feeling, and are always close at hand ready to clothe our

thoughts and hide the nakedness of our invention with primitive aprons of Art.

There is another great reason why leaves are so suitable for design. The earliest form of Art shows a perception of only one dimension—that of length, and expresses itself in little more than mere lines. The next step, as we saw, rose to the appreciation of a superficies, and we began to have glimmerings of breadth as well as length. Very few people can express, or care to express, more than these; and though nothing in Nature has less than three, the third dimension is, perhaps, less marked in leaves than in any other class of things. Their charm, in fact, lies in their thinness; a thick leaf would be intolerable. They are in consequence peculiarly well adapted to be the first things chosen by an art which is limited to the same conditions. Sculpture deals properly with the three dimensions; design with but two. Chiaroscuro, or light and shade, is only a trick to make a flat thing look round; excessive admiration of it has invariably ruined Art, because it is an intellectual and not an imaginative accomplishment. So, then, the conditions of decorative or non-realistic art allow greater realisation to leaves than to anything else. Flowers, for instance, cannot be so easily drawn, because they present greater difficulties than even more solid objects. Almost anything can be represented more easily than a flower, which besides having an extremely difficult outline and delicacy of texture and colour, is almost always based on the scheme of a bell or funnel; so that while a sufficiently distinctive idea of a man, or a horse, or a bird—things of a comparatively high organisation—can be given by an absolute outline of them, or, by what demonstrates the case more readily still, by silhouettes, the characteristic hollowness of so many flowers is entirely lost by the same process. In fact the flowers which are most easily represented are those that display this feature least: flowers with quaint shapes, like the dielytra, snapdragon, and sweet pea, or those whose open faces hide no secrets, like the daisy, violet, and wild rose. No disparagement to flowers is here intended, no preference for the leaf "whose lusty greene may not appraised be"; on the contrary, I can only think of flowers as individuals of

too strong a personality to be adequately expressed by our spiral in its present form, while the greater simplicity of leaves peculiarly fits them for it.

Plate VII. illustrates a classification of leaves based on that form of leaf in fig. 6 which gave us the central type of all leaves. It is more or less in the shape of a heart, capable of being lengthened into a shaft or pulled out laterally into a bow. These are extreme shapes, between which all the leaves of the first class will naturally fall; and as we shall find it very convenient in practice and in teaching to call these types of leaves by their Christian names, we will christen this cordial one a poplar leaf. First in the series, however, we must place a leaf of the laurel tribe, on account of its classical and undying fame. Next, an apple leaf, which in curvature comes half way between the laurel and poplar. Thirdly, an oak leaf, for the sake of its undulating outline. The elm comes next in increase of curvature and for an example of serrated edge. Then the poplar, the heart of the whole series, which is appropriately represented by the heraldic form of that organ. It is very difficult to select a typically English plant to give its name to the sixth and last member of our first division; we want one that will include the singularly beautiful shape of the horned leaf that occurs so effectively in the Christian-Egyptian tapestries, as well as that scientifically known as sagittate, of which the sorrel leaf is a good instance. Perhaps the best example we can find is the leaf of the convolvulus or bindweed, which, weed as it is, might claim the honour of the position if it were only for the vivid and persistent way in which its growth recalls the serpentine character of the spiral.

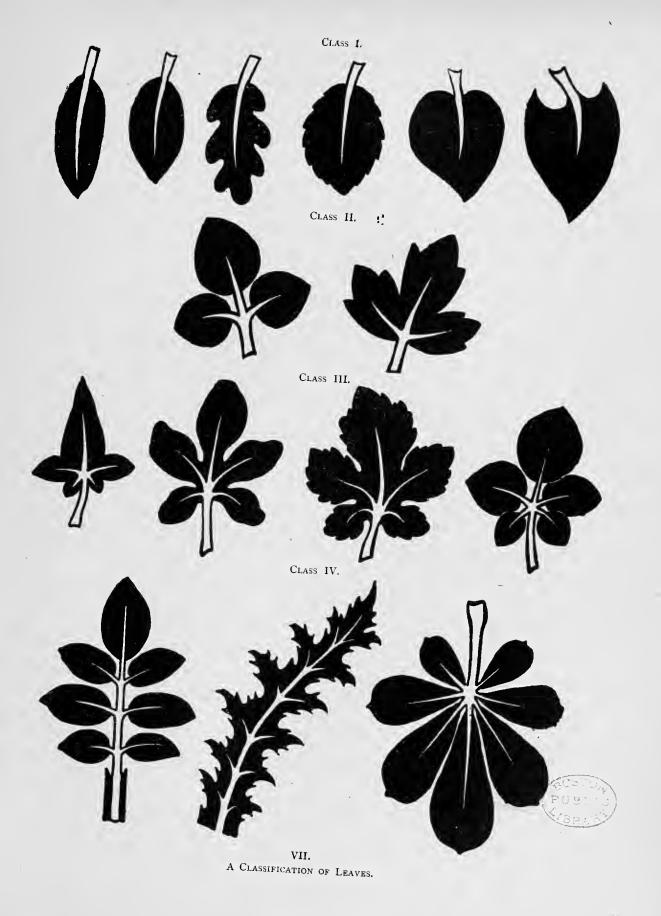
The leaves of this first division have only one main rib, a central one. They are all contained in a simple and large outline, and are therefore the easiest to draw, as well as the most familiar of leaves. The serrations which finish the edges of the elm, and the undulations of the oak do not really interfere with the main direction of their simple contours; so a great distinction must be drawn between such subordinate irregularities of outline, and those which are dependent on the constructive anatomy of the leaf itself.

Our second division consists of leaves whose stalk divides into three ribs, a central one, with a subordinate one on each side, or of leaves that are divided into three distinct parts or leaflets. The strawberry is a fair type of those that are composed of three distinct leaflets; but I cannot think of a typical example to stand for those that are not so completely divided. It is not a favourite form among the better known leaves: perhaps the youngest leaves of the thorn, those that grow at the tips of its new shoots, fulfil pretty well the desired conditions; so we will call this decoratively useful leaf a thorn, though its older leaves are so serrated that they lose the characteristics of the class.

The third division consists of leaves of five ribs, or five parts. The ivy with its simple statement of this feature, the vine with its sharp serrations, the fig with its blunt lobes, and the bramble with its completely separate leaflets, constitute the members of this division.

The fourth class consists of leaves which have seven or more distinct ribs. The thistle (acanthus) is the central type. The rose leaf stands for all that are composed of separate leaflets set along a common stem, and the horse-chestnut for cases where they radiate from a common centre.

These fifteen samples of leaves, laurel, apple, oak, elm, poplar, and bindweed, of the first class; strawberry and thorn, of the second; ivy, vine, fig, and bramble, of the third; rose, thistle, and chestnut, of the fourth, will supply an easy and fairly comprehensive classification of leaves for the purposes of design. Such a classification is of course only suggestive, and never pretends to be exhaustive or completely satisfactory. Almost all leaves will be found to fall into one or other of its classes; but I do not think it is necessary to increase the feeling of dogmatic pedantry which is apt to haunt all attempts at analysis by trying to find places for such eccentric specimens as the leaves of the cabbage, nasturtium, or dandelion. Brevity is no less the soul of wise classification than of wit, and as this analysis of ours is an æsthetic, and not a scientific one, it does not forbid the selection of any leaf which happens to appeal to individual taste. One of its objects is to draw attention to those



simple leaves of our own country with which we are sure to be more or less acquainted, and to insist on the necessity for learning to apply them in our Art, before rioting in that glut of abstract foliage which is allowed to pass unquestioned under the mask of Acanthus. The various and involved forms of our own thistle and poppy-leaves present us with quite as serious difficulties, and as many suggestions of ingenious harlequinade as ever satisfied the soul of a cinque-cento ornamentalist.

The outline of every leaf is only a modification of one of the first class. We can prove this by drawing a line round its principal extremities (fig. 8). The thistle is the only exception. Though necessary to our classification, its broad base and peculiar insertion





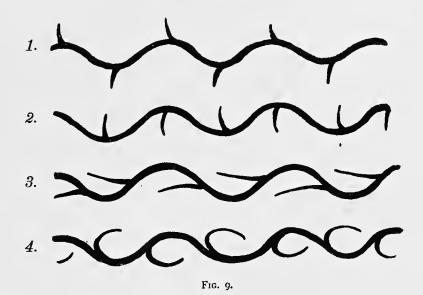
Fig. 8.

prevent its being put to the same use as other leaves. It suggests the possibility of that radiation of pipes and ribs which belongs to the acanthus, and which it is the aim of the acanthus to display, a function we have no intention of following at present.

We have already given a poplar leaf its place in the spiral; we can now please ourselves with drawing a number of other spirals with a different leaf in each (Plate VIII.). It will certainly increase our respect for a traditional system to find our resources multiplied so generously. With a little love of leaves, and a large sense of proportion, you will find infinite material in the familiar world of green things around us; and if you want to introduce more than one sort of leaf into your spiral, there is no objection to your doing so, so long as your stalks and leaves are not too much like real

stalks and real leaves. We should certainly be shocked if we found figs and thistles growing on the same bough, because we know they grow on different plants. If we do not want the gardener to criticise our design we must plant trees that never grew in his garden; then perhaps he may learn to admire even if he cannot understand.

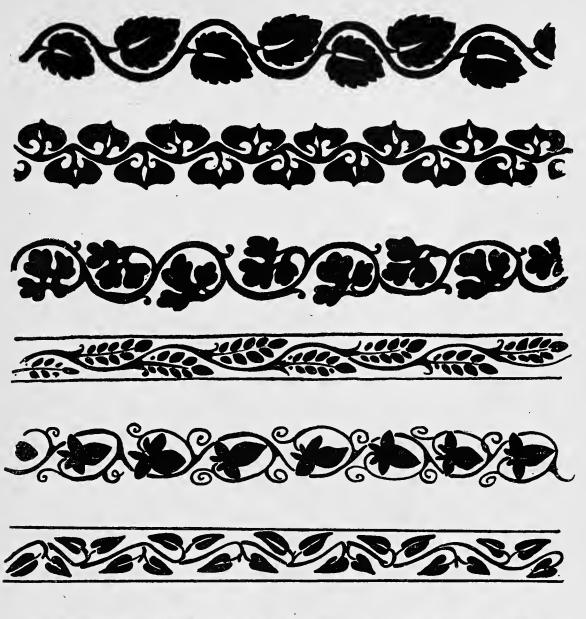
Our progress is now become too rapid and too varied to allow us to illustrate all the changes the spiral can undergo. We already have almost endless opportunities of ringing changes on the original



theme, and shall, naturally enough, feel tempted to put what we have learned to the test, and elaborate its details. But as we have not time here to carry out such an extensive plan, I will try to select, as we proceed, examples of patterns to illustrate possibilities of development which we are not always at liberty to investigate as much as they may seem to deserve. If you will look again at the spirals in Plate VIII. you will see that the leaf-stalks or petioles spring from different positions, and have different lengths in each example; and you will remember that a little time ago we saw how the spiral might subdivide and throw off lateral and almost independent branches: so that our resources are multiplied by exactly the number

of ways in which we can vary such conditions as these. Fig. 9 shows the four main positions of the petiole in regard to the spiral, and they apply equally well to most kinds of spiral and almost any form of leaf. In 1, the petiole springs from the extreme outside of each bend; in 2, from the extreme inside; in 3, forwards, from a point halfway between the top of one bend and the bottom of the next; in 4, backwards from the same point. I need not suggest, I should certainly fail to enumerate, how many delightful varieties of pattern can be based on these four methods; and even if we limited ourselves to the narrowest paths that tradition allows, and refused to exercise any independent imagination, with our fifteen leaves and our four methods of insertion we should be able to supply our friends with a choice of at least sixty patterns if they happened to want to carve a lintel or embroider a table-cloth.

Once more let me warn you to avoid falling into any mechanical or methodical habit. Remember that your original spiral may be gracefully Greek, or stiffly Gothic—as open as a tidal stream, or as sinuous as a mountain torrent. Keep an open mind, too, in the matter of colour. Every leaf is not green in Nature, nor every stalk brown. Much may happen to the petiole itself before it reaches the leaf. It may indulge itself in an extra twist or two to make up for a lack of agility in its parent stalk, or to show its own lightheartedness; or else it may become a minor and subordinate spiral, dividing itself and throwing off two or more leaves instead of one. This is an important modification, and in itself the origin of a large class of patterns which depends on the varying length and directions of the subordinate stems or petioles. But however diverse and replete our patterns become, we must always maintain their conventional arrangement; and however much we borrow ideas from Nature, we must never, except for purposes of study, copy her examples. To do that, and call it Art, is rank blasphemy. With such restrictions as these, the deeper our acquaintance with Nature is, the more interesting our patterns will become; but our knowledge must pass through the alembic of our imagination before it becomes Art. Our humanity grows with the increasing strength of our individual





sympathies, more than by a vague and wordy expansion over the world at large. A wider and more wonderful infinity lies within us than without. Even if there is evidence of reasonable design in Nature, at present it is beyond our comprehension to grasp it, while Nature overwhelms us with the number of her facts. Even the microscope on the material plane reveals more monsters than ever peopled prehistoric deserts. Wonders, indeed, for such as care for them; for us, a greater miracle claims our worship while we can watch the daisies grow and hear the birds sing.





THIS method of working side by side with Nature, but more under the guidance of traditional and imaginative methods than by an obsequious copying of her processes, will necessarily introduce many new elements into the spiral. The leaf is not the only factor of the plant that can be conventionalised, and though we are at present obliged to reject the flower, because it is generally too complicated for our purposes, the bud and the fruit are simple enough to be used with great effect.

The first appearance of the bud is a knobby protuberance on the side of the spiral (Plate IX.). Its first duty is to balance a leaf on the opposite side, or humbly help to fill an empty interstice whenever it may occur, rather than to pose as itself the main feature of an interval; so that in the illustrations I give you, it will necessarily hold only a subordinate position. The ideas the bud has suggested have evidently had immense influence on the traditions of Christian art. It would indeed be instructive and entertaining to read the history of ornament from a mythical point of view alone, by tracing the growth of the bud from its spontaneous birth to when it burgeons into full significance as the paradisiacal tree. Here, however, we have more to trace the actual shapes that artists have given it, than to follow so fanciful a chronicle. First, then, we must feel the charm of budding things in the world about us: in April watch

along the hedgerows how they struggle to escape their swaddling bands, to rise and stretch their arms, and toss their heads in the new air; or notice in the garden how, when it has burst its shell, the silent and erect axis gropes through the earth's dark body, pushes the clods aside, and springs into lusty life. If you mark how stiff and strong and quaint these babes of the field are, you will learn more art, more of the essential feeling that underlies all renaissance, than all the systems and the teaching of all the schools of Art can Much of what is overlooked, or ridiculed as archaic ever tell you. or crude in mediæval Art is, in fact, an intentional effort to convey this feeling. Such work is Gothic art, not Greek, and prefers strength, even savage strength, to gracefulness or effeminacy. It is the sturdy instinct of young nations bidding us rejoice in the advent of spring. I wish I could analyse these things, but their occurrence is so unexpected, so naïve, so brimful of virility, that they defy definition, and laugh at all idea of order. You cannot classify them any more than you can drill a troop of babies into a regiment of soldiers. Their influence on us is a purely moral one. Look at that indescribable bract which the young shoot of the walnut erects for no apparent purpose except for show; the clasped crosier of springing bracken; the apex bud on a branch of horse-chestnut; or watch how beans and peas push themselves up through the soil, or how the precocious blossom of the Japonica swells in an incomprehensible way till it bursts in rapturous bubbles. We cannot notice and admire these things too much; they are the very soul of spontaneity and freshness, and will always give us a standard of form and gesture.

Buds are peculiarly the property of the decorative and symbolic artist for this reason as well: they seldom occur in conditions that appeal to the realist. The realist is more attracted to Nature's results than to her means, to the flower more than the leaf or bud, to the satisfaction of desire more than to the anticipation of it. The bud is perhaps not so much represented in art as that its spirit permeates the whole of Christian tradition. It seems to hide in its little fist all the nervous possibilities of Spring, and as soon as it has unfolded or thrown off one or two lateral branches it becomes

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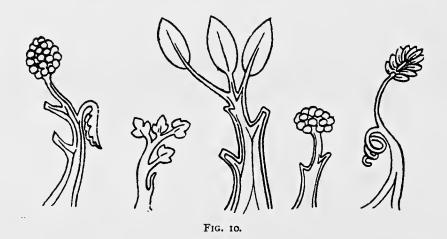




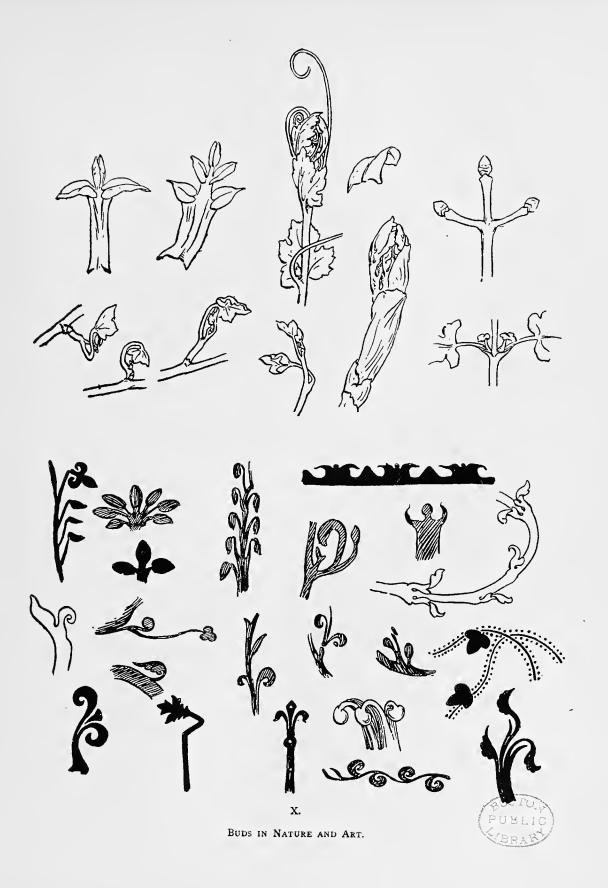




in anticipation a tree, and in early forms of Art is recognised as the symbol of one (fig. 10). What a poor sort of compromise with Nature your modern artist thinks of such trees, with their stiff stem, their pair of stubborn branches, and half a dozen leaves! It is however no more a compromise than his own, and an infinitely more decorative one. The modern tree of our landscape art is the symbol of only the external and aerial aspect of a tree. The tree of tradition is a powerful and quite conscious epitome of its character and growth. At present our bud is innocent enough of such a future, and can only little by little unfold its destinies. Nor must we forget to include in our idea of the bud the stipule and bract,



and all those immature parts of the plant which are replete with promise, and dare to lend themselves with supreme insouciance to any service (Plate X.). Remember, then, how many unscientific shapes the bud can be made to take, figuring now as a stipule, again as a half leaf, and now as a curled and inconsequent thing, but always with a sense of frank innocence and almost ridiculous gravity. Some buds—especially those of large trees, such as the horse-chestnut, lime, and sycamore—develop into crosses of variously graceful shape, and are for that reason particularly valuable and suggestive. We shall have to deal with this subject in a later stage of our tradition. But there is another traditional form of bud to which we must call attention here. The young fronds of ferns are the best illustrations



of it in the vegetable world, when the stark vigour of the young bracken pushes a crosiered head through the short turf of the common, just as if it had made a mistake and come up in the wrong place, so little does its artificial quaintness seem in keeping with the crooked gorse and ragged heather which are natural there. But when it begins to unfold its arms in a pretty architectural way, and clutch at the air about it, could anything better symbolise our delight in the funny gestures of newborn things? In its earliest appearance too, while it is still curled in profound sleep, its shape is echoed in many a shell we gather on the shore, and noticeably too, in that of the common snail. This is the shape that the Doric capital and the Gothic crocket have immortalised. It is a mysterious curve, this line ever returning on itself to hug its treasures of coiled meaning. We have used it already often enough, though I dare say unwittingly. Take this spiral (fig. 11), for instance, and you will see that with



very little alteration it consists of nothing but a row of snail-shells. This curious relationship is by no means an entirely accidental one; it is only another proof of the synthetic character of traditional art. The consciousness of this character, and the constant desire and expectation of finding fresh analogies, is a most important feature in all conventional work that is earnestly vital. Again, the double curve of the unfolding and aspiring bracken repeats the line of beauty and of life—the main line, it seems to me, if sensitively drawn, in the construction of every creature; while if it is continued it becomes our own spiral, which is in consequence the logical symbol of an untiring energy and growth. When the folded frond is uncurled, it discovers a serried avenue of smaller but similarly curled fronds, which in their turn consist of still others. How could we find a better natural illustration of that characteristic of traditional Art on which I like to lay so much stress: that infinity within finite limits: that tree of ancient pedigree whose every branch is rooted in the

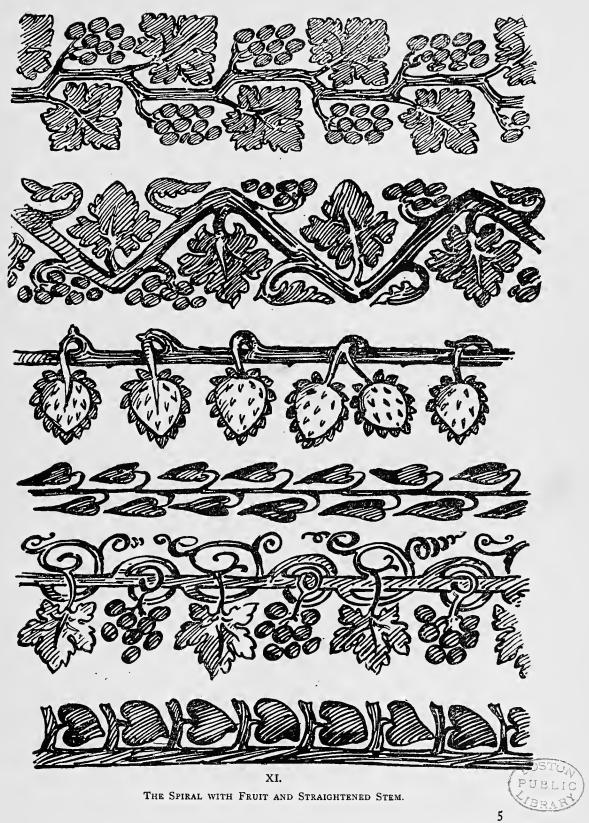
centre of the universe, and carries a host of leaves and the seeds of a thousand generations!

The art of design is the art of giving us pleasant sensations by the means primarily of form. Any attempt to systematise its principles must give precedence to those objects whose form is their main characteristic, and will necessarily treat of those objects first which possess the simplest forms. We have seen how the complex shape of most flowers prevents their use in the simpler kinds of spiral; but another reason is that their most obvious charm lies in colour more than form, so that they will be most valuable where that quality of colour is displayed to the greatest advantage. The spiral does not always supply that amount of contrasting sobriety of background which is essential for any decoration in which flowers take a prominent position. Those conditions are amply fulfilled by the conventions of a Semé, where the background, or field, can very easily be made to represent those olive greys, and quiet emeralds, so necessary for the proper vision of flowers, and which, to the eyes of simple people, make the homeliness of cottage gardens lovelier than the exotic barbarism of the glass-house. The flower too is really the apex of the tree, the crowning glory of the plant. Shorn of stalk and leaf, like the prize blossoms in a flower show, it is only a surfeit of luxury, and a sin against good taste. Such reasons as these prevent the flower from often taking the place of the leaf in the spiral. But where the flower fails, the fruit succeeds admirably, either as an occasional alternative to the leaf, or even, as we shall see, entirely as a substitute for it. The strawberry is an immense favourite here, but almost all fruits are ripe for service: the gooseberry, mulberry, blackberry, and raspberry, with their homely and quiet colours; the clustered currant and grape, and all our orchard fruits with their sober citrines and russets; those substantial vegetables too, of culinary purport, with which Crivelli decks the shrines of his Madonnas-netted melons and pimpled cucumbers, and peas in rattling pods. Here too, the squirrel's harvest of homely nuts, with all the rustic fruits of our forest trees, acorns and chestnuts, beech masts and pine cones, will have their place. Think of the nomad

thistledown, and those quaint "bunches of keys" that dangle from every maple! How cleverly the seeds of the iris, poppy, and snapdragon are packed, and in what ingenious cabinets! Surely here, if anywhere, is the clasp of Nature's necklace; here at once her beginning and her end. Fuller than the leaf, simpler than the flower, the seed and the fruit are the first palpably solid forms we must learn to use. Full of mystery; dead, but how living! Inert, but how active! A grain of mustard seed to-day, but to-morrow the birds of the air shall make a town of it!

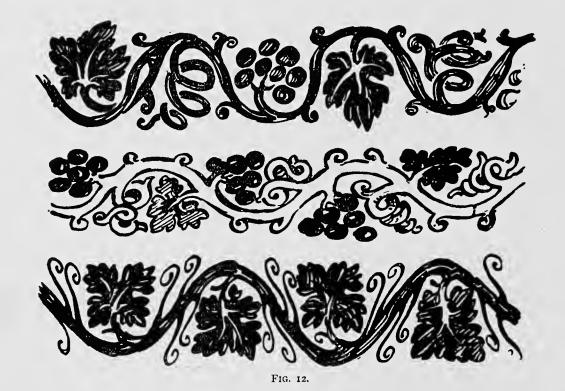
The outline of most seeds is simple enough, and not unlike many leaves of the first class. Their quiet tints, too, unlike the positive colours of flowers, harmonise with alternate leaves and enrich the monotony of the spiral. The implication of mystery involved in the use of the seed gives rise to a peculiar but suggestive use of it, and one that shows the conscious symbolism instinctively introduced into noble and spontaneous design. The glorious hue of the flesh in which the seeds of the pomegranate lie, added to their traditional value as symbols of prolificity, have often led artists to display the fruit disclosing the seed, and the exquisite ingenuity of many seedpods has often tempted him to paint them in undisguised section. The seed in its bed is typical of latent powers in all of us, and only waits for sunny encouragement to sprout and shake out its leaves. It is a source of myth and a motive of decoration, as true now as it ever was, and one that cannot fail to excite our keenest interest while the mystery of life remains, as may it ever, unsolved.

So now the fruit takes its place in the spiral, and alternates in an occasional fashion with the leaf (Plate XI.); but while a strawberry or robust apple here and there would hardly affect the spiral's normal curve, if we took to hanging nothing but fruit on our bough, the combined weight of it might tend to pull the spiral out of shape, and we should have to tighten it into very nearly a straight line before we should feel that it was safe. Such might be a not altogether improbable origin for the use of a straight stem instead of a curving one, as in some of our instances in this plate. Sometimes the spiral, not to be so easily ousted, winds ivy-fashion round it;



and even when it is absent its character must be maintained by a compensating frivolity in the petioles, or in closer and more sensitive arrangement of tributary leaves, or only, and as I think most effectively, by merely a tempting sequence of erect or pendent fruit.

Tendrils and thorns are the few remaining organs of the plant to notice in connection with these simple and generally regular spirals. The tendril itself in connection with the vine is of immense importance,



and can of course be amply illustrated. The way in which he treats the tendril always gives us a clue to the imaginative faculty of the artist, because the tendril is the engineer of the vine, and has to carry out its plans with a forethought and calculation which altogether exceed the skill of a vegetable intellect. You may feel tempted to treat it exclusively as a slender and twisted stalk; but in the first of these three instances (fig. 12) it is straight and narrow, and in the second and third it is twisted and thick. The reason for this difference is that in the first case the tendril is contrasted with the comparatively



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solid masses of main stalk and leaf, and has no room to curl about in, while in the other instances it has to take the place of these masses, and behave like one itself to the best of its ability.

Before we bring this part of our investigation to an end, it will be best to look at some characteristic spirals which are not strictly within the direct lines of traditional development. They insist on distinct features derived from fanciful or accidental exaggerations of eccentricities in the normal spiral. For instance, the spiral stem will often adopt a squarer or more angular form, to better adapt itself to the same irregularity in the leaf. I have given instances of this in Plate XI., a, b, and so long as their usual proportion is maintained, these slight variations need not call for any special comment. But as soon as this habit extends to the gradual subordination of the spiral to the leaf, and its final almost extinction, it gives rise to a class of spirals which insists on this irregularity and rejoices in it (Plate XII., a, b). This class of irregular spirals, though a very beautiful one, by reducing the function of the stalk to a mere compromise, destroys that balance between it and the leaf which is so important to their mutual development, and therefore stands by itself outside the main course of tradition.

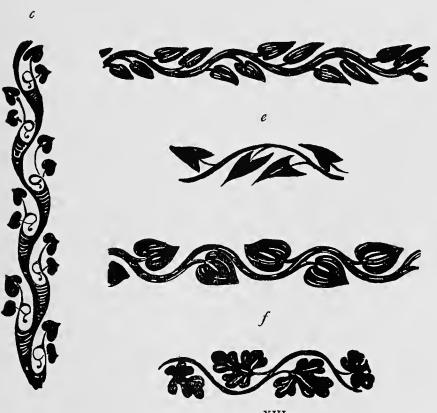
But these irregular spirals are not on this account to be neglected. On the contrary, they are the exceptions that not only prove the rule, but are essential to the integrity and usefulness of the whole system of tradition, which would otherwise become dead and insipid. They teach us, at any rate, the value of accident. Where perfect accuracy is demanded, variety is impossible, and variety we know is charming. The practice of Art should teach us to emphasise our eccentricities with grace, not to conceal them as deformities. Conformity to public opinion, which deifies the average, is ever the enemy of personality, which is the soul of Art. Our greatest achievements are often little more than the frank acceptance of a blunder, the wise submission to a disappointment, or the still wiser imposition of a limit to our efforts.

Another irregularity; if we may call it so, owes its origin to the natural thickening of the stalk of a plant at the nodes (Plate XII., c).



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XIII.
IRREGULAR SPIRALS.



The exaggeration of this natural feature in the spiral results in a series of trumpet-shaped funnels, and rapidly becomes associated in our minds with cornucopias disgorging all sorts of good things. There are delightful instances of this convention among the Byzantine ivory carvings. Our illustration is only a free rendering of one of them.

A third class is obtained by surrounding the leaf, or whatever the occupant of the spiral interval may be, with a margin of white. This practice is frequently met with in illuminated missals and ornamented letterings. Its value is best appreciated when colour is employed, because the purity of all colours is put to the greatest test when they are compared with white. The whole spiral runs the risk of becoming confused or indistinct if its colour or tone resembles too closely that of the background, and then the insertion of a white border will often effect the necessary relief. The same method is advisable if you wish to insert a very delicately shaped leaf or other object into your spiral. Such a palmatisect leaf as the monkshood, for example, should be painted on a white ground. The shape of this ground must be that of a plain unserrated leaf of the first class, corresponding to the monkshood, but a size or so larger. presence of this argent shield protects and displays the frail aconite, and supplies that simplicity of outline which always makes the simplest ornaments the most effective ones. This method may of course be reversed (Plate XII., d), and a white leaf may be planted on a black ground, or on one of any suitable tone or tint.

The acanthine is a fourth form of these irregular spirals (Plate XII., e, f). It consists of a charming amalgamation of leaf and stalk, the natural outcome of adapting the leaf of the thistle or acanthus to the spiral, and if it is treated in a quiet and simple fashion it makes a delightful form of ornament. There are some exquisite examples of its use among the Egyptian tapestries, where it is made to bear marvellously strange and beautiful fruit. It wants fresh and gay colour to enable it to look its best, then it is one of the prettiest spirals I know.

Another class of irregular spirals we may mention here is an

instance of the effect obtained by introducing what we may call the frieze-motive into the spiral (Plate XIII., a, b). It consists, as far as the design goes, of any spiral; but its whole course is broken up into alternating passages of light on dark and dark on light. These contrasting passages illustrate perhaps the simplest form of frieze; and if it were not for the continuous pattern which runs through it all, would not be included here. The simplest method of producing this effect is to keep reversing the tones or colours of the spiral and its background, and the peculiar pleasure which is obtainable by mingling two distinct decorative principles is well worth noting.

The student of patterns will doubtless discover for himself many other kinds of irregular spirals: they are as numerous as irregularities are world-wide. I shall give instances of others later on, but the last I need ask you to observe now, we will call upright spirals, because they are more suited to a vertical than a horizontal attitude (Plate XIII. c, d). I would assign them a similar origin with that class in which the idea of the thickened node or cornucopia was dominant. That idea is, however, secondary to the idea of a somewhat spasmodically upright stem; while the conventional or traditional character of the spiral is maintained by the regularity with which its progress is broken by whorls of leaves, flowers or fruit. Their tendency to relapse into Renaissance arabesque must be guarded against.

I will end this chapter with two other examples of irregularity, which can hardly however be considered typical of any class of spiral (Plate XIII., e, f). The first of these is a delightfully naïve example of unscientific innocence, in which each interval is filled by two leaves side by side on separate stalks. The other illustrates a useful method of breaking the monotony that is sometimes caused by all the leaves of the spiral running in one direction. This is effected by boldly reversing the direction of an occasional leaf. Nothing could show more clearly than this how loosely a dependence on natural law is held in the spiritual or imaginative world.



THE use of the pure spiral probably originates in, and is perhaps most effectively illustrated by, a waving line painted or scratched round the body of a vase. As soon as the artist has contrived to make the two ends of the spiral meet, without interrupting the rhythm of the line, he has a continuous spiral, and a symbol of perpetual vigour. This is easiest seen when the spiral is drawn round the inside brim of a plate, which is only a vase or basin conveniently flattened to show the whole spiral at once, while in the deeper utensil it must be always half lost to view. In this circular and continuous form its symbolism is evident enough, but when we wish to use it for other than circular decoration without losing sight of its meaning, some appropriate method of terminating it will be necessary. Such a necessity would arise, for instance, in a frieze round only part of a room, or over the head of a window, or in a border across a curtain or table-cloth.

The first and simplest method is to cut the spiral off abruptly, wherever you want it to end, as in most of the examples I have given so far. No one will ever find fault with what is after all the most honest compromise with the really continuous character of the spiral (Plate XIV., a).

A second and more usual method, when the spiral is a vegetable one, is to bring it to a natural ending, with a terminal leaf, fruit,



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XIV.

SPIRAL ENDS.

or other organ of the plant (Plate XIV., b). Such a method, of course, must only be adopted at one end of the pattern, or it will give the spiral a weak and indecisive appearance, unless we make it spring from one of the sides, rather near either end in preference to the middle (Plate XIV., c). This will restore an organic strength to the spiral, and allow us at the same time to treat both ends of it in this, or in any other method. But if in this method both branches are terminated in a normal manner, that is to say, with a leaf, bud, or flower, the whole spiral will give an organic idea of a tree, though certainly a very elongated one, and connect itself at once with those traditions which properly belong to the tree, and which we shall study later on.

A fourth plan is to reverse the tones, and set a dark spiral on a light ground, or *vice versa*, for about an internode and a quarter at the end (Plate XIV., d). This is most effective when used in combination with the first or with the last method we shall have to treat of here, and is of course only an adaptation of the friezemotive we noticed in the last chapter.

The last method of ending, or rather beginning, the spiral, is to make it spring from a bowl, basket, or vase; or in grotesque symbolism from the mouth of some sacred or profane monster, a dragon or a sphinx (Plate XIV., e). In time we shall learn to draw such things as these, and to introduce them in their proper relation to the spiral. A tradition loses all its force as soon as it ceases to lead from one thing to another, and to connect the most complex subjects by the simplest means; nor would the study of the spiral itself be so important, if we did not feel it to be a symbol which is capable of wide-spread application. For instance, the traditional artist who understood its greater meaning, would want before long to introduce some reference to his own life into the spiral, such as the pots and baskets of daily labour; and his use of them while it was a novelty, would be all the more significant for their being of human construction and not Nature's. With their mythical meaning uppermost in his mind, he would certainly incline to disregard ideas of such minor importance as the laws of gravity,

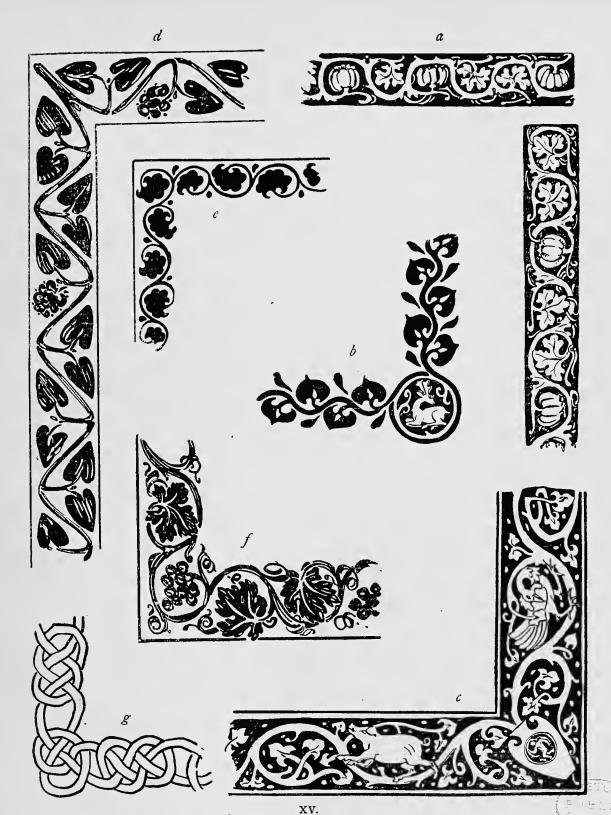
or considerations of probability and proportion, when they interfered with his desire to introduce some special meaning into his work of Art. A vase, for instance, loses nothing of its intentional value as a symbol by being placed on its side, or even turned upside down, so long as the pattern of which it is a part does not lose any decorative value by harmless vagaries of this sort. As for that traditionally confirmed habit of making the spiral issue from the mouth of some possible beast, or impossible monster, the custom is more excusable than at first sight appears. If the Tree of Life carries a fruitful message for us, a light may be thrown on its meaning when we see it flowing in artful speech from the tongues of dumb animals, or the mysterious creatures of our own imaginations.

It would be easy enough to account for these unrealities of design by a Russian scandal theory, and call them the outcome of a sequence of efforts to copy an original and serious design. People who hold this theory always think that the aim of Art is to hold a mirror up to Nature, and forget that its history climbs from the abstract to the imaginative, and falls from that to the realistic. Myths spring from ruder forms of myth, and not direct from natural origins. If Art means for us the creation of a mood by imaginative means, we shall easily believe that artists would be more inclined to emphasise, than correct, such unrealities, as soon as they discovered a sly suggestion in their use. We can at any rate recognise that in spite of their impossibility these chimæras are interwoven in a very subtle way among the chief pleasures of the arts of fiction.

The liberty we may take with the normal attitude or position of anything, that is to say, whether we may put a thing in a position or attitude it cannot maintain in Nature, depends on its relative importance to the whole design, and the use that design is to be put to. It would be absurd to plant an image of the Tree of Life upside down in the centre of a design, but we may allow some eccentricity of shape and attitude in the more conventional border round it; and so long as the freaks of our fancy remain subordinate to the whole scheme of decoration, we must not criticise them too scientifically. As yet we are dealing almost entirely with such

conventional and subordinate forms of ornament as borders, for the spiral, to the extent we have carried it at present, is little more than that. There can be, properly speaking, no top or bottom to a design on a plate, carpet, or shawl; and this fact has had its inevitable influence on the whole of the principles of design, so that in proportion as the thing he has to decorate is likely to be used in varying positions, an artist is justified in disregarding the natural position of the things that help to make up his design; and with the confidence that no one will expect him to tell the scientific truth when he has only simple things to decorate, will allow himself to make all the charming mistakes, and create all the irreproachable monsters that people his fancy. But if he knows that his work is to be rigidly fixed, and pitilessly exposed to everybody's opinion, he will be careful to gild his pill with sufficient truth to cover its imaginative iniquities, and will at any rate count his chimæra's legs, and moderate the length of his lion's tail before he turns them loose on a practical world.

It is not very difficult to modify the spiral when the pattern has merely to curve; but if we want it to turn a sharp corner its actual construction must evidently undergo a change. We had better instance a few possible ways in which this change may be effected. The simplest way, as in the first method of ending the spiral, is to make a compromise of the whole matter, and put one complete spiral at right angles to the end of another (Plate XV., a). Like all simple ways of getting over a difficulty this contrivance has a very special charm, and in certain instances, as when there is no central design, or only an unimportant one, a sense of largeness and freedom is gained which we miss in designs with more elaborate corners. The charm of construction is often most pleasing when it is most obvious. The spirals that are used for this sort of border may end in any way which does not diminish or increase their breadth, but they ought all to end in somewhat the same way. For the rest, if the space to be included is an oblong, the longer sides should stand on the shorter. Another method (Plate XV., b, c) is to place some object at the corner, such as a vase or a medallion, which will either fill the gap which the spirals make when they meet without overlapping, or act as a



SPIRAL CORNERS.

common source from which both the spirals could flow. This would lead naturally enough to the idea of making them spring from a common stem (Plate XV., d). And, lastly, we must learn to make the spiral turn a corner without any break in its continuity (Plate XV., e, f, g). The last figure in this plate is an extremely ingenious example of the way a rope spiral overcomes the difficulty, and is well worth study and respect. I have taken this spiral from an old stone font, and you might at first think it crude and barbaric; but the ingenuity of interwoven line, and the deliberate placing of main masses, proclaim a very high pitch of artistic perception in the artist who invented and carved it.

We have now reached a very important point in the development of our tradition; and before we turn the next corner ourselves, and pursue new roads, we ought to rest and rapidly review our situation. We have followed the spiral from its simplest and most inorganic forms to a point where it reaches an obvious resemblance to vegetable life; and there can be no doubt that these later developments, with their particular appeal to our knowledge and love of natural things, are the more interesting, though the earlier ones touch us strangely with their simple method and unclothed sentiment. From the first to the last, however, the essential conditions have been maintained, and whatever change the spiral has undergone, however real its dependent forms have become, the tree that bore them has remained obstinately, unnaturally conventional. If now, in our pause here, we choose to predicate that the aim of Art is to imitate Nature, and, carried away by the successful introduction of natural objects into the spiral, declare the conventions with which we have limited its freedom to be unjust, and the paths we have travelled so far little better than blind gropings in the dark, we might begin all over again by reforming or restoring the spiral into a natural bough. If we did this, and followed our new clue consistently, we should find a vast field opened to us-the whole concrete universe of material facts, and the shifting phenomena of light and shade. I do not know whether it is the belief that they are painting real things, or merely the fascination of recording an ephemeral impression, that

induces modern artists of the realistic school to desert the traditions of the past and aim more and more at the exclusive imitation of Nature; but whatever the cause may be, signs are not wanting to-day to show that Art, and the happiness and peace that Art brings, can no more be found in the exclusive investigation and record of natural facts than the secret of life can be discovered by sacrificing the lives of innocent animals that we have made dependent on our kindness. Art that is based solely on the imitation of Nature is unprincipled Art, because principles do not exist in Nature but only in the human imagination. Traditional art is delightful and permanent, because it is an imaginative statement of the laws of Nature. To copy Nature is at best only to give an instance of the working of those laws, never to state them. A picture is valuable as a work of art precisely for the amount of imagination it embodies, for the amount of untruth it contains; for the nonsense of it, not the sense. All systems of tradition regard the imaginative expression as of the primary importance, and only admit natural facts so long as they do not interfere with that expression. The study of Nature is indeed a valuable one, but not as a final form of Art. Its object is only to increase our experience and feed our imagination. Later on we shall, as I have already suggested, see the sapling we have planted grow to become a noble tree, but it will always be the type of a tree, never a real one; and conventional not from ignorance, but from direct intention and purpose.

Conventional, fanciful, imaginative, traditional: such words as these are among the most despised and rejected of epithets. They hide, however, valuable truths, and must again become honoured and approved.



In the last chapter we saw some of the ways in which the spiral might turn corners and become a consciously broad ornament as well as a long one, and in the face of this development we felt it advisable to pause and review our situation. On the one hand we felt that an exclusive association of the spiral with vegetable life might lead to an uncompromising realism and put an end to any principle of tradition; on the other hand there was a danger lest the tradition we had already successfully pursued might, for want of a fresh outlet and further application, become hopelessly stereotyped.

Tradition, however, possesses a quality which it is not usually credited with—the power, namely, to go on developing in the future as it has already developed in the past; and the further development of the spiral itself will only seem difficult if we have forgotten its passionate origin, and the wider meanings of which it is the symbol, and have come instead to think of it as only the stem of a plant conveniently twisted for decorative purposes. After picking the fruit from one branch of our tree we must return to the trunk before we invade another. All true conventions are primarily expressions of feeling, and only subordinately representations of fact; and this vegetable form of the spiral is only one of many kinds of spiral. It predominates because its simplicity has made it a constant favourite; and as its curves are found in so many manifestations of

life, it has earned the right to vitalise the whole of Art, and point the way to more delicate expressions of human imagination. I have tried to suggest, for only suggestion is possible, that Art is feeling expressed in a practical manner, and that Tradition which helps us to express our feelings in this wise way does not act in an irregular and spasmodic fashion, but with a circumspect propriety and method of its own. I have compared this tradition to the course of a river or the growth of a tree with a central trunk or channel and lateral branches, which again divide into ramifications as extended as our experience. So it will be necessary in future, as our need for expression grows, not to strangle our tradition by too firm a grip on it, but to be somewhat careless of detail so long as its gist is not imperilled. We must learn to recognise the spirit of the spiral in other guises than we are accustomed to, and to guess its presence from a footprint here and there, or a hint dropped, as it always will be, if the design is a good one, and the artist knows his business.

This book does not pretend to teach people how to draw; and though I have shown a way of drawing leaves in the simpler spirals, it was to insist on the necessity of a spontaneous method before an imitative one, a necessity that applies to drawing not only leaves, but everything. This opens up a subject of great extent and enormous interest, but one which is outside our immediate purposes, and I must be content to assure you here that in all final and classical Art, this spontaneous element is the prominent one, and that in all work of confessedly decorative aim the forms are built up in the same way as this leaf was, that is to say, by a subjective and not by an imitative method. A thing is well drawn from this point of view when it fits its environment; such a round blob filling such a square hole in a convenient and comfortable way. I am fond of referring to the outlines on the Greek vases as the best models for our guidance in the matter of drawing things; because in their gradual mastery, through the course of centuries, over all animal forms, we shall almost always find at any period a patient respect for the traditional type, and a jealous supervision over any alteration in its severity. Archaic Art is entirely misunderstood if it is taken to be nothing more than a child's attempt to copy the things that please him most. The Greek artist was not afflicted with the desire of competing with Nature. He never attempted to be real, till the general relaxation of principles tempted him to cater to the demand for novelty and exhibit his own cleverness. When he did take to copying Nature instead of inventing types, he paid for his popularity with the loss of his inherited tradition. Here (fig. 13) are two fishes, the first of which is the sort of fish or typical dolphin a Greek artist of the central time, with his tradition at his

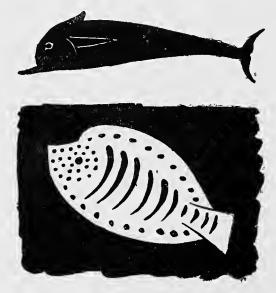


Fig. 13.

finger ends, would deliberately draw with a sweep or two of his brush, and half a dozen scratches of his graver. The second is a good illustration of what his ideals are worth after he has "learnt to draw," but has unfortunately forgotten to call for his model at the fishmonger's.

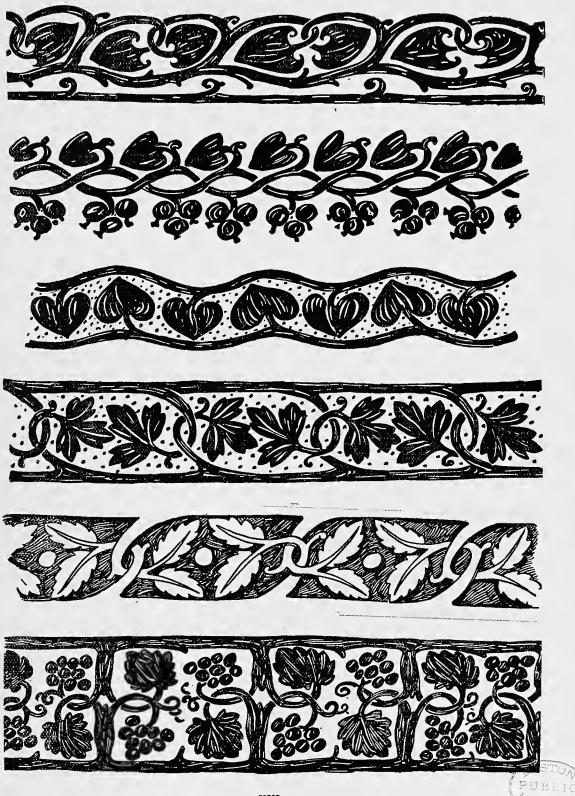
Perfect ideals will of course exhibit great knowledge of the realities they idealise, but it takes ages to determine which features are the most suitable to commemorate. This is tradition's hardest task, and in Greek art was only acquired by centuries of restraint, and lost as soon as that restraint was removed. It is foolish to regret what was inevitable, and to leap now and at once to the possession of complete

and noble types would be beyond our powers. We can do little more at present than protest at our miserable inadequacy to cope with the immense variety of modern knowledge, and point to the change of feeling that must precede any attempt to establish Art on a permanent footing. Our students are too often set to copy Greek art in ignorance of the very conditions under which it was executed. Greek artists did not copy, they invented in the best sense of the word. If Greek art is our aim we ought to pursue Greek methods of study. Our museums could supply the requisite information to make this possible, but so far they seem to suggest that when we have ticketed our specimens and locked them up in glass cases, we have got all the good out of them we can. The very light these treasures have thrown on the past hinders the future from benefiting by them. They have become too exclusively associated with matters of history, and research has proved prejudicial to reconstruction.

This subject touches us closely, for no spontaneity is possible while shallow accuracy and blind subservience to dead ideals is made a sine qua non in Art. Every instance of spontaneity is unique. To produce a masterpiece you must shut your eyes to all previous achievements, and draw on your own capital of inborn energy. Do not trouble your head yet about accuracy. Mistakes are fatal to mathematics, and anachronisms to history, but Art does not hold truth with so tight a hand. What is in touch with its sentiment is, for it, true, what is not in touch with it is false. Some hope of better perceptions may be gleaned in these days from the attempted revival of handicrafts, and an instinctive and popular appreciation of what is called quaintness; but the very use of such a term shows how far we are from recognising the peculiar character of imaginative work, when we suppose that its quality can be rendered by the affectation of a particular style. Let us assert, once for all, that you can no more draw in an imaginative way by pretending to be innocently simple, than you can think in a mediæval manner by writing "ye" for "the." The best art is the directest way of saying what you have to say in the easiest way you can. The affectation of mediævalism is not the acceptance of mediæval tradition; it is

only saying you believe a thing which you don't, and is evidence not of imaginative feeling but of the want of it. There are always talented people who can draw delightfully, but for whom creative imagination is a Bluebeard's chamber they enter at their peril. These are the people who will be helped by a tradition more than any others, because it will give them subjects which their own acknowledged skill and personal peculiarities will embellish. No one can be a law to himself in Art, and the genius is not born who can afford to neglect the humblest processes that prolonged custom has sanctified. It is only with the decay of faith, and the loss of tradition, with the corresponding growth of the delusion that we can find out the reason of everything, and go anywhere by the help of steam and chemical analysis, that Art stooped to chronicle obvious and uninteresting facts, or tried to escape the ennui of them by futile efforts to resuscitate the past. When the sun was a visible god, and his royal progress through the constellations was fraught with significance, when every cluster of stars was linked to a world's story and a hero's name, Art was indeed a potent factor in Life, and at times her inspired interpreter. And now though perhaps we do know how far the stars are and what they are made of, that is no reason for climbing down from the zenith to the dunghill. Instead of banishing spirit from Art let us bring it from beyond the sky triumphantly home. If we are materialists, let it be because we believe that matter is inseparable from spirit. But matter as the inevitable expression of spirit is quite a different thing from matter as its barrier and prison.

Our tradition's main line is marked by a gradual change into forms of ornament that often appear at first sight to have little in common with the types from which they spring. To trace this central motive, and keep it distinct from the various tributaries that flow into and out of it, without neglecting them, is necessary if we want our tradition to be consistent. Tradition is eminently feudal, and any attempt to treat its examples as isolated patterns based on natural forms is unscientific, and can only issue in hopeless confusion. In view of later and more organic conventions, the spiral, as we



XVI.

left it, will very likely appear a somewhat unambitious form of ornament, and we shall naturally enough feel anxious to push on to opportunities of larger expression; but there are a few forms of it that we ought to notice before we do so, subordinate types and heads of families grouped round their traditional chiefs.

The first of these to occur is a spiral with interlacing branches (Plate XVI.), which is capable of being varied in many different ways; and still greater variety is obtained when the pattern consists of two parallel spirals. The whole succession of them from the simpler examples to the more complex make a delightful and instructive series. We may call these "Interlacing Spirals."

Plate XVII., a, b, illustrates a type of spiral which is worth noticing because its characteristic squareness deserts the suavity of the usual form for a more abstract one, and allows at the same time greater liberty to the filling of the intervals of it. This spiral tends to develop into a line of more or less connected frames or links; a change of immense importance, as we shall discover by-and-by. At present we must not break the integrity of the spiral as a continuous line. The advance to greater freedom is evidenced by the insertion of animals, who fit into the spiral but are not part of it. They introduce the idea of the frieze into the spiral: that is to say, of a line of isolated figures, such as a row of buttons, for example. We shall discuss the frieze in a later chapter.

In close alliance with the simple interlacing spiral is another of a distinctly arabesque character (Plate XVII., c, d). Our first example of it is in fact adapted or borrowed from a plate of Spanish manufacture. In the original the quality of the leaves and their connection with the stalks is, if I remember rightly, rather incoherent, and like much of Eastern patterning, more abstract than Western or even Celtic minds admit. We love a natural sequence and a consistent plot in our fairy tales, however impossible the characters themselves may be; so that when we want to acclimatise a foreign fancy we must often trim it into some semblance of respect for the prejudices it has come to live with. Our second example of this type is much more Teutonic in feeling, with its shields and suggestion of serviceable









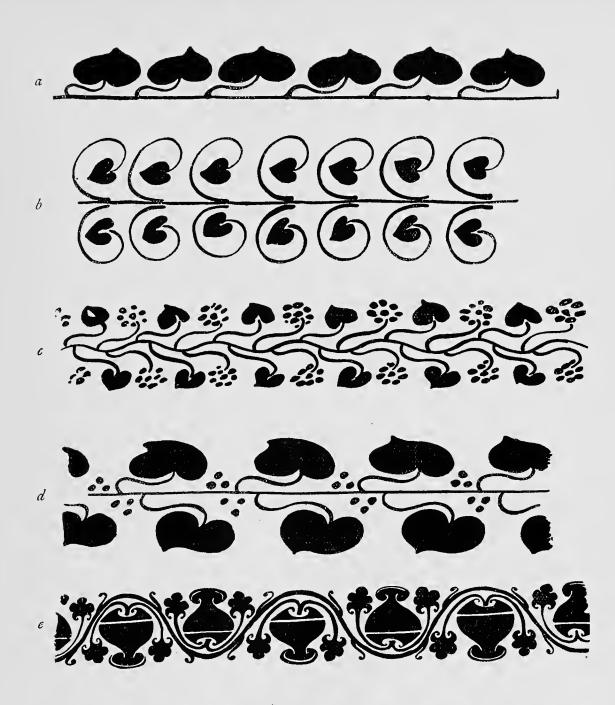
XVII.

Square Chambered and Arabesque Spirals.

trees. We may reasonably call these spirals Arabesque Spirals for this reason as well—that they show a natural tendency to escape the linear determination of a spiral and cover spaces instead, which is the more legitimate office of an arabesque. Thus in the first instance the height of the branches is quite arbitrary, and if elongated would soon deprive the pattern of any right to be called a spiral at all.

Next to these and connected with them by inherent slenderness of line, though far nearer to us in actual construction, come many spirals from archaic Greek sources (Plate XVIII., a, b, c, d). These are quite innocent and simple, as we should expect the early efforts of a nation with great artistic instincts to be, before natural ingenuousness has yielded to a recognised style. Indeed, their Art, as every nation's at such a time, is essentially Gothic in its absence of prejudice, instant obedience to happy impulse, and disregard of symmetry so long as it gets its feelings expressed. There is consequently every reason for not refusing these spirals a place in our tradition, and no fear of their relapsing again into the mechanical inanity of classical Greek ornament. It is worth remembering, while we are on classical ground, that Gothic artists could not, or intentionally did not, try to attain the technical standard of the old classical work. This makes their Art so charming. The models were before their eyes—they could not fail to try to imitate them as children would; but like children they were incapable of comparison, or too delighted with their own sensation of achievement, too full of new ideas, to see any particular advantage in making patterns symmetrical instead of rugged, or dead instead of living.

We have already seen a vase introduced as a convenient method of overcoming the difficulty of turning a corner. Among the Christian Egyptian tapestries we find it also used in the place of the leaf or spot in every interval of the spiral, and sometimes in lines without any spiral at all except what is suggested by the crossing of the branches which grow from the mouths of the vases themselves (Plate XVIII., e, f). Whether the mythical significance of a vase led to this favourite employment of it, or whether the similarity of its outline to a leaf's was the reason, it is difficult and





GREEK AND VASE SPIRALS.

unimportant to determine; but in the latter and more probable case, we have an analogous pattern of the same date consisting of a row or frieze of hearts which undoubtedly bears a still closer resemblance to a row of heart-shaped leaves. The sort of symbolism a row of hearts would imply is, perhaps, not quite in accordance with the dogmatic and somewhat Athanasian feeling of that time. In early forms of Art a symbol is used more in a religious than an artistic sense, and consequently would occur alone, while a whole row of hearts implies an almost embarrassing philanthropy which even the culture of the present day has scarcely attained.

The question of the origin of the shapes that occur in some patterns is an interesting one, because, in trying to find out what they mean, we shall come across a number of patterns consisting of forms which are more unreal than real, which may suggest but never realise (Plate XIX.). These patterns hold somewhat the same relation that the Scandinavian rope and chain spirals do to more organic spirals, and set us an example of simplicity,—for to be effective they must be simple,—which we are glad to meet with when we are tempted to indulge in too much detail. Some of a very primitive type we have already drawn attention to. I do not think they should be much insisted on, but they cannot altogether escape notice. Some are doubtless traditional descendants of more organic patterns, and some are the result of the legitimate exercise of an imagination which does not care to embody itself in a more direct manner. When we come to study friezes and their kindred patterns we shall find this tendency to inorganic form taking a much more prominent place.

Closely allied with these inorganic patterns are others either derived from heraldic sources or animated by an heraldic sentiment (Plate XIXA). Society is too complicated in these days to tolerate the exclusive right of a few people to assume the proud distinction of personal emblems. Heraldry, as an aristocratic fetish, is no longer protected by law; its glamour is greatly a mirage of the past, regretted only by the sentimental advocates of reaction. But the spirit of Heraldry is far from dead, and must rise to brighter resurrection











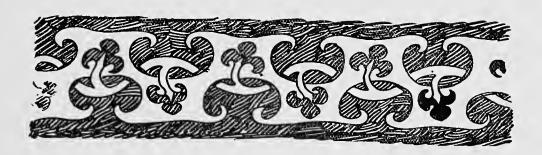


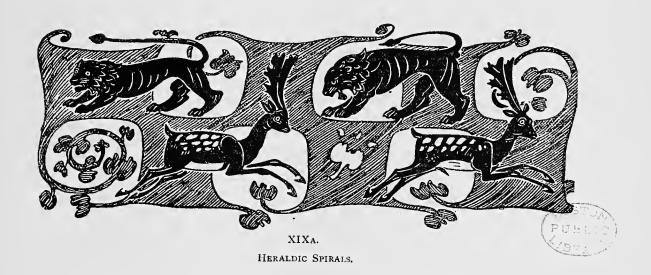
INORGANIC SPIRAL PATTERNS.

from the dry husks among which it still pretends to linger. The old Heraldry was doubtless with sufficient truth rooted in personal egotism. The new Heraldry must be based on wider reasons than mere pride of descent or prowess in battle. What forms it will take it would be foolish to predict; but it is easy to see how the conditions have altered, when the very shield, which was the unquestioned medium of this self-advertisement, is no longer a necessary part of a gentleman's equipment, but has become itself a traditional symbol, and a mere form of ornament that anybody can appropriate. What, so to speak, was once the binding has become part of the book. And those Quixotes who hunger in regretful dreams for the old days, would do well sometimes to remember to whom the beauty of the past was in the main due. It was the unrecorded tailors, smiths, and limners who produced the pageant, and wrapped the tournament in charm. The gentlemen only supplied the bloodshed. The Heraldry of the future will be the nucleus of its Art, the laboratory where essentials are filtered from dross, and Nature's real meanings precipitated by cunning chemistry from the confusion of her facts.

We are sometimes asked to believe that as the world gets older and wiser we shall do without Art, which is after all only a kind of child's play and make-believe, and learn instead to express our ideas and feelings in exact terms. But we cannot escape from Art, because in our evolution truth first looms through a haze of guess before its outline crystallises into fact. The indefinite must always precede the definite, faith anticipate knowledge and poetry prose. So far from doing without any more Art, the use of symbols, of hyperbole in speech and gesture in action, is bound to increase with the progress of our own intelligence. An atmosphereless certainty would bring us no joy or peace; we must learn to accept the riddle of our existence, and in every mystery discover a revelation. How glad, then, we ought to be when so infinite a science as this of heraldry ceases to possess a limited interest, and enters on a wider field of usefulness! Instead of discarding it we have hardly begun to imagine the magnitude of its scope. The destiny of every force is to exert wider and wider influence. Once the kettle only sat on the fire and boiled; now it has gotten







itself wings and wheels, and carries us round the world. Already an increasing interest in matters of Art shows that the public is beginning to recognise that artists and craftsmen have a special and almost levitical duty to fulfil: to promulgate, if only by example, the old truth that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every act of his imagination.

The student of decoration cannot afford to neglect the study of ancient heraldry, for not only are several of the elementary spirals among its simplest conventions, but there are many other valuable suggestions to be gleaned from its pages. Its methods are entirely conventional and symbolic, like our own; but eminently practical as well, for in the successful application of its principles to every sort of material from silk to steel, it has laid down rules which we also can profit by when we want to apply our own designs. Here, however, I only wish to suggest the inclusion among our patterns of some with a real or affected heraldic sentiment, and to remind you that the science has immense claims on our respect, because it is the custodian of ancient and valuable tradition.

A spiral which constantly occurs in Christian Egyptian ecclesiastical tapestry, and of which Plate XX., a, b, gives a rough idea, exhibits that mixture of innocence and daring which invariably attends the inception of a new era in Art. It is probably nothing more than the irregular insertion at several places along the spiral of an ornament intended at first to come only at the end. There is nothing original in such a scheme as this, but somehow in Gothic hands, backed by Gothic imagination, the pleasant surprise of these interruptions constitutes a pattern which is quite unlike the formal classicism of previous types. Compare it, for instance, with the monotonous alternation of triglyph and metope in a Greek frieze: whether the metopes are carved or not, the principle of the whole pattern is mathematical and unimaginative. It is reared in honour of a god-not of flesh and blood, but of stone: it may be sublime, but it is not living. Here, on the other hand, is a pattern from a Christian priest's vestment, which is quite typical of the new religion it illustrates: a religion dangerously subversive of symmetrical

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respectability of all sorts, but homely and warm for all that. Perhaps you think I exaggerate the importance of such a simple pattern as this; certainly it is only typical of the change in Art which accompanied Christianity. Nevertheless, if you are sceptical about symbols being as intensely significant as I infer them to be, see if you can invent one that is entirely new. You could as easily invent a new chair, a new bed or table, new material to take the place of paper, a new alphabet, a new letter, or a new word. Our patterns are in their way as precise a means of saying what they mean as our language is. The traditional or original ones constitute the fixed alphabet of Art. A thousand years may alter the shape of a letter here and there, but seldom adds a new one. We may combine them in a million new ways, and must do so if we have anything to say for ourselves. Art is the combination of traditional symbols, as speech is the combination of traditional sounds. You may talk gibberish so long as you find it mistaken for an oracle, but if you want to make yourself understood it will be wiser to adopt the current sounds that sane men have always accepted.

These "interrupted" patterns, as I call them, are based, as we have said, on the irregular interruption of the spiral. In the living or Christian type of this pattern, these interruptions are caused by the insertion of recognised forms such as the square, diamond, circle, oval, or other shapes. We shall have to make a closer acquaintance later on with these traditional forms. This is almost our first introduction to them.

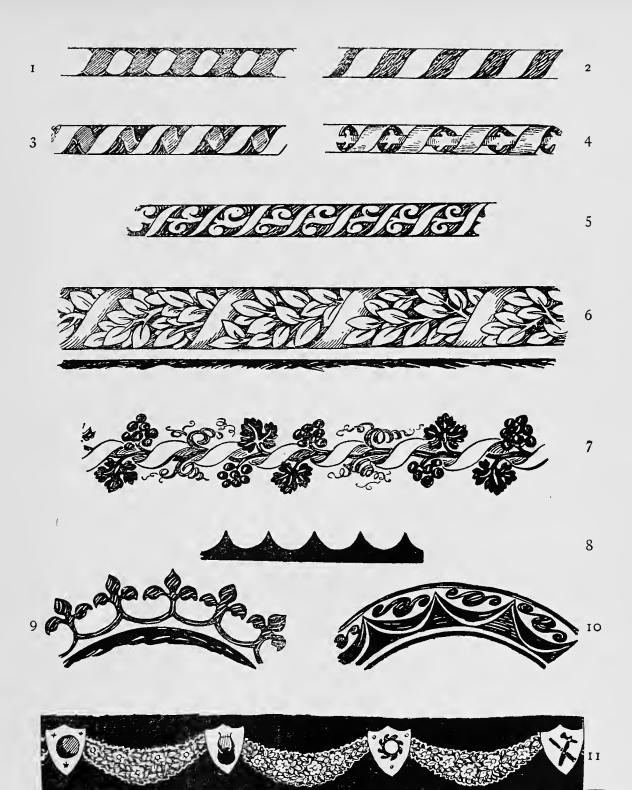
There is a marked tendency, in many of the examples in this chapter, to keep the spiral more understood than actually expressed. The final claim that tradition makes on Art, even if it discards all other shackles, is the confession that the artist does not want you to mistake his work for Nature's. It is no compliment to the counterfeit to mistake it for the reality. Next to this limitation, which admits the greatest possible amount of freedom, and which therefore very few artists can do justice to, comes the Art which obeys a traditional convention in the arrangement of its subject. Plate XX., c, d, e, gives examples of this class. The leaves, birds,

and fishes of patterns like these are arranged in evident obedience to a formal scheme. They are pictures with the idea or feeling of the spiral prominent, but without its being actually present. Such patterns possess a peculiarly modern sentiment. They illustrate action instead of rest, and consequently require considerable assurance and spontaneity in the artist. Following this clue, we may remember how instinctively free the decoration is that occurs on the pages of Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience," where it supplements the text with imaginary note and fanciful commentary. Compared to much recent imitation of mediæval borders, Blake's efforts in this style appear at first singularly weak and unlearned. But though his art often relapses into mannerisms, as his prose into metaphysics, the astonishing wonder is that this apostle of imagination, at a time when nobody cared for Gothic Art, instinctively selected a Gothic method of expression. Deficient as his expression is in many respects, Blake's work on those lines joins with Ludwig Richter's in healthy protest against the conscious imitation of old "Drive your cart and your plough over the bones of the dead," is a proverb of his we ought to remember. Use the past, yes! but as a field from which the crop has long been taken, and the reapers called to rest.

We are probably justified in assuming that the characteristic intricacy of Celtic Art is due in great measure to certain habits and feelings among the people who practised it; but there is no reason for refusing something of the same character for evasive and roundabout expressions to individuals of other nationalities as well. A spiral form of ornament whose curves recall a rope or cable should be popular with a seafaring folk, and appeal to a larger public as well, since the same feeling of twist is involved in other things besides ropes, as, for instance, in plaited hair and wreaths for festal or religious purposes. There is an obvious value in believing that patterns were invented to express the same feelings they excite in us. The public will accept such an Art as instinctively as they accept the feelings of which it is an echo; and artists, who should be people of exceptional susceptibility, will continue to find in the

conscious expression of their own feelings a fertile source of further inspiration. I assume, then, that a class of actions which culminates in the making of wreaths for festal and religious purposes excites a pleasurable sensation in most people, and is immortalised in a special form of Art which we may call the "Wreath" pattern. Art is merely a name for those things we do or make in which the spiritual or imaginary predominates. A creed of practical kindness, a poem in praise of the plough, a chant in time to the oars, or lullaby to rock the baby over the sea of sleep, such carving round the cup as may enhance the gift if only of cold water-all this is Art. And to make a wreath is Art too, and to my mind nobler in perishable bay than in permanent gold. The imitation of the natural wreath in leaves of thin gold, however warranted by classic use, is typical of essentially vulgar art. In making a wreath of real leaves the imagination is entirely and rightly occupied in the arrangement of them. This is genuine Art, because Nature does not show us how to do it. To go to the trouble of first making the leaves, when Nature has always a store of quite suitable ones, is to throw labour away. In the spirit of fun you may build a paper boat or a gingerbread cottage, but you must not waste precious time and precious material in elaborate shams. A boat, for instance, is a symbol of time, and as such is a legitimate ornament on a clock, and the more impossibly seaworthy it is, the better symbol probably, and the better Art; but to build models of great ships, with hull, rigging, masts, and sails out of solid metal, as one has seen, with a clock, of all things, hidden somewhere in the hold, is ridiculous. A symbol must never pretend to be more important than what it decorates, and to place a wreath of gold round a man's brow is practically to suggest that he is too good for this world.

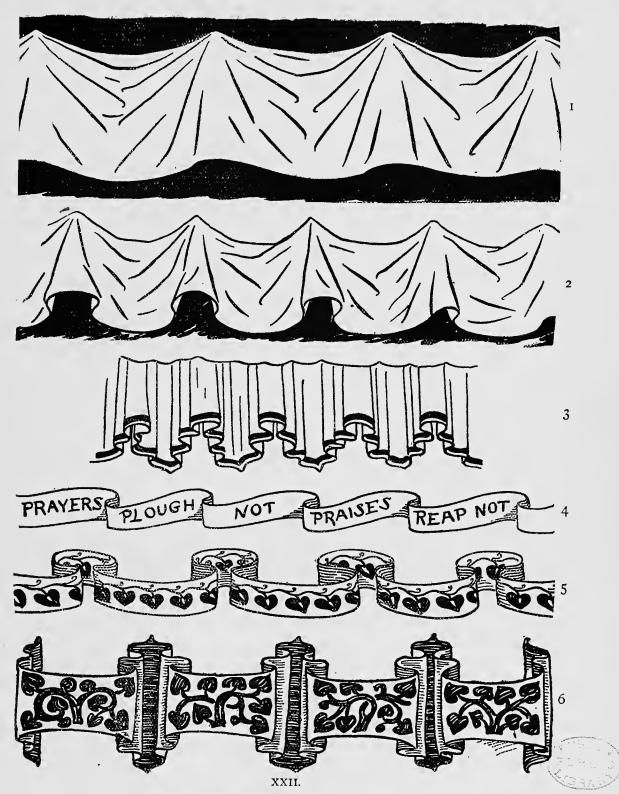
But think, on the other hand, of all the feelings and gestures of which making a wreath is only one outcome, and you have the key to a series of patterns applicable to every handicraft (Plate XXI., 1—7), of which the simplest is no more than the lines which mark the twisting of the strands in a rope, or the ribbons round a maypole. They are as numerous as there are possible twistings and plaitings.



XXI.
WREATH AND INVECKED PATTERNS.

In plain outline they are not very interesting, and only useful where narrow borders are wanted. But their somewhat uninteresting regularity offers a capital opportunity for elementary practice in the use of colour. Children, for instance, might be taught to tint every alternate space, or, better still, to twist a coloured ribbon round a white pole, leaving the ground to show equally with the ribbon. This practice could be made to extend indefinitely, and would develope the best sort of artistic feeling in children before any grown-up theories of Art could enter their heads. How this might gradually lead to the keeping of festivals with beautiful ritual, procession and song, makes one feel how meagre our revivals of Art, Gothic and other, are. They only seem to touch the outside, and leave the heart of things still bare and cold. The difficulty of instilling into the average mind any conception of the wider sense of Art, as the Sacrament of the whole of life, is almost insuperable; but if people who are fond of children could be induced to revive, or failing the memory of any tradition, to inaugurate, innocent festivals accompanied with dance and song in honour of season, saint, or hero, a new era of Art would dawn in the wisest and happiest way.

But to return to more immediately practical ideals, our next step in artistic education would be to cut a wand of sprouting thorn, or wild cherry, or other lusty bough out of an April hedge, and wind our gaudy ribbons round it, between the springing blossoms or buds. In this way we shall get a prototype for further developments, and from this our progress to many artifices of wreath and festoon is clear enough, till the more rarely recurrent ribbon gives place to shields and cherubs' heads, or even-which the scientific Renaissance prefers-to bullocks' skulls. There are a hundred beautiful types of these patterns to be met with in early Italian Renaissance sculpture; nor would it be right to leave the subject without appreciative recollection of the gay wreaths of della Robbia's majolica. festoon in itself is a genuine source of pattern, and introduces the "invecked" line which is an heraldic variation of the zigzag. I give a few examples here of invecked patterns (Plate XXI., 8, 9, 10, 11). Most of them are very simple, and of hardly sufficient interest to

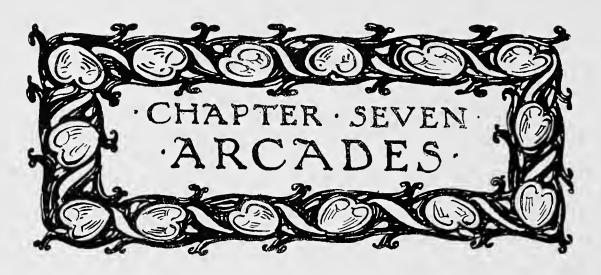


DEVELOPMENT OF SCROLL AND LINEN PATTERNS.

stand alone. They consequently appear to greater advantage when they are used as borders to more important designs, especially when those designs are circular ones. Their more developed forms are very artificial, and often consist of somewhat paltry ribbons and bows; and as the idea of festooning gets prominent they become immensely popular with the later Renaissance decorators, in whose hands they degenerate quickly enough into meaningless Arabesques.

One of the most noticeable instances of this invecked line occurs along the top edge of hanging tapestry; so that from patterns based on the idea of the festoon we glide naturally enough into those which are based on the lines of drapery. If you will take a strip of material that falls easily into folds, and pin it by its longer edge against the wall at intervals about equal to half as much again as the piece is broad, you will be able to study the laws of drapery sufficiently well for our immediate purposes. Every time you readjust the pins, or shake the stuff, it will fall into different folds; but no disposition of them will alter the essential fact that the top line remains an invecked one, and the bottom convex between the pins and concave directly below them (Plate XXII., 1, 2, 3). The curvature of this bottom line increases in proportion to the sagging of the material between the pins. When the stuff is rather taut the bottom line becomes a flattened spiral; when it sags the spiral tends to the "nebulæ" type. Then by cutting the material into large vandykes so that the points fall between the pins, we shall get a complex form of nebulæ which is a very favourite one with Greek artists on account of the nice vertical zigzags that are got in this way. But within these outlines the main disposal of the folds is simple enough, though in more complicated arrangements it would considerably tax our ingenuity. All we have to notice here is that the lines which represent these folds radiate from each pin or point of suspension, and that the lines which radiate from one centre rarely run into those which radiate from the next, except near the top edge, but interlace with them in a way that has made the study of drapery as fascinating-I was almost saying as fatal—as that of the Acanthus. Into the ethics of the use of drapery in Art we need not enter now at any length. Whether we adopt the Florentine convention of flowing and inflated folds, or the Roman with stiff and ponderous ones, or the Flemish with its bony angularities, matters little, so long as its sentiment is in keeping with the meaning of our picture. What matters a great deal is, that too much attention should not be paid to a thing of secondary importance; and it must be confessed that an excessive use of drapery has been a marked sign of decadence in Christian as well as ancient Art, both in sculpture and painting. To paint the soul it is not always necessary to hide the body. There is nothing indecent in the naked body. Only that is indecent which conceals a nobler thing than itself. When the office is greater than the man who fills it we may delight in his clothes, and such a delight is legitimate. But when the man himself interests us, it matters less how he happens to be dressed.

To return, however, to our model drapery, let us see what more, without the necessity of any sacrifice, it can be made to suggest. Firstly, if we take the line of its lower edge and repeat it at greater or less distance, we shall get an infinite variety of scroll patterns (Plate XXII., 3, 4, 5). And, secondly, if we turn two of these lines back to back, we shall discover how all those patterns are made which are called "linen" patterns (Plate XXII., 6). These scroll and linen patterns are available for inscriptions and other decorations, just as the value of the material on which they are based is enhanced by the addition of embroidery; and, indeed, they are not often interesting enough unless they carry some such attraction. The linen



E have seen how soon Greek artists deserted the direct guidance of the spiral, and threw their strength into developing the more naturalistic art of the frieze. The line of spots or blobs, which is the earliest form of this method of decoration, became in their hands a powerful source of tradition, and one which, though we were at first obliged to set it aside, we may now follow with advantage. For though we are perhaps naturally attracted to the spiral more than to other forms of ornament, it would be wrong to-day to shut our eyes to the value of any tradition which embodies feelings we have learned to appreciate; besides which, the Greek element is so subtly interwoven into the civilised art of all subsequent

paved the way for a fuller acceptance of all traditions based on strength of feeling, wherever they may be found.

I called Greek Art naturalistic in contrast to the more obvious conventionalism of the spiral, but we must not imagine for that reason that the Greek artists were actuated by realistic motives. That they were great naturalists we will readily admit; that naturalism and realism are the same things we must strenuously deny. We say, rather, that Greek Art is great only so long as it is conventional—not in the sense that the subjects it deals with are conventional or mythical, but because it treats everything in a conventional way; nor must we think that its own convention is less binding on Greek Art than the presence of the spiral has been on our own, merely because it may be less easy to detect there.

Though, at root, the frieze is only an irregular row of spots, dots, or blobs, its finer developments are by no means so simple; and I have therefore put the spiral first, because it is easier to make a satisfactory pattern by filling the intervals of a zigzag with pleasant objects, than to put the same objects, sensitively, in a row by themselves. The zigzag or spiral determines their position in the former case, in the latter we have to learn to do without it. I think we shall understand this better as we proceed; and in the meantime the more sensitively we can learn to fill the intervals in a spiral the sooner we shall be able to draw a frieze; so that the spiral may be called the nurse of the frieze, because it carries its charges in its arms till they are old enough to walk alone.

Advocates of a mechanical art will derive the frieze from a line of equal objects placed at equal distances from each other, just as they would derive the spiral from a line composed of equal segments of a circle. Unfortunately for such a plausible theory, as soon as the objects began to vary in size and shape the necessary calculations would take up too much time, and would end by robbing the pattern of all its spontaneity and vigour, qualities which are indispensable in ornament, and which depend, like certain sweet discords, on delicate infringements of arithmetic law. The composition of beautiful ornament may be analysed in the same way as music can, but the

carefullest and most elaborate dissection of his art will never make a musician.

Now, though the frieze is but another form of linear decoration, we cannot make one out of a spiral by merely taking away the winding line or zigzag which lies at its root, for that would still leave its charges in an obviously zigzag position. The result might be quite harmonious, but could not be strictly defined as a frieze, nor would our object be gained by pushing some up and others down till a straight line of them was formed. We must therefore take a frieze on its own conditions; but there are, nevertheless, some patterns which are neither quite friezes nor spirals, but which we may derive more immediately from the latter. Of these patterns the arcade comes first in order, because its connection with the spiral is the most obvious. It is a justly popular form of Art, as its constant and inevitable use in architecture of all sorts proves. If we wished to find an origin in nature for its popularity, the first avenue or clump of trees will suggest one. In the alternation of column and arch there is enough material for thousands of designs. But I think it will be better to base our arcades, as we have the rest of our tradition, on forms which our own feelings first and our material wants in the second place have suggested, and which are none the less true though they may be more abstract than others that Nature has planted round us. It is perhaps impossible to say how far our observation of nature has helped our imagination; but my own feeling is that the aisle of a Gothic cathedral is as original an invention on the part of its builders as the trunk is on the part of the tree. The same idea is indigenous in both, and neither has probably copied from the other. As soon as our imagination, egged on by our needs, has "discovered" a labour-saving instrument, we are apt to see its analogies all around us, and call in Art to heighten the resemblance. In the same way there are probably things which happen every day before our eyes, which seeing we see not: forces which would revolutionise all our industries if our eyes were only opened to see them lurking in places we never suspect because we have grown so used to them there.

We will return to our original spiral, then, and by a quite natural and easy emphasis on the down-strokes turn it into the pothooks of any child's school copy-book (fig. 14). Here, you see, we get an arcade without much trouble; but what a pity it is that our schoolmasters appear so blindly ignorant that the child's copy-book has anything to do with art! Our children learn to write and read with difficulty and pain because our alphabet in its present condition is so ugly. If it were treated in a beautiful and delicate way, caligraphy might again become an accomplishment. As it is, with our modern Moloch fetish of competitive examinations, the greater education that learning to write might involve is out of the question.



FIG. 14.-POTHOOKS AND HANGERS.

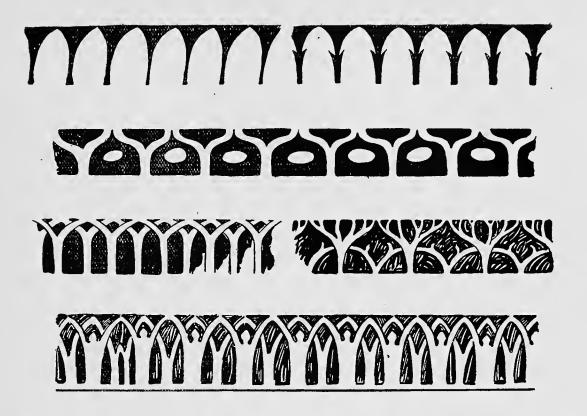
Now, the arcades we shall get in this way will often be as irregular as those in the wood, and will require some drilling before they can be turned into proper patterns (Plate XXIII.); and though the arcade depends on repetitions even more than the spiral does, we must take care not to let the repetition be mechanical. In a steam-engine paradise all the cast-iron trees are exactly alike, but we must avoid that sort of perfection as deliberately as Nature does. An architect is forced to calculate the strain and distribute the weight of his materials, and is therefore, I dare say, often obliged to be monotonous; but we must not therefore allow him to tell us that virtue resides in symmetry when the question is not one of construction. If the laws of gravity are neglected they will prove dangerous, but at present we are building with fancies and not with

bricks. We are not just now building churches; and if we want to paint arcades on our parlour walls it won't hurt anybody if a column here and there leans a little to one side.

Nor must we be tempted at this place to give a lengthy or even a short analysis of the different forms of arch. The student of architecture can find them easily enough. It is rather their heresies, their *in*applicability to construction, and suitability to surface ornament instead, that ought to specially interest us. The feeling of construction and strength they give us is very important too, but it must be given in a decorative and imaginative way, and not in a mathematical one.

The arcade is such a favourite source of pattern that I am loth to leave it without some attempt to lay a stress on the feelings of which it is in great measure the expression. All undertakings which are firmly rooted in deep soils of security and truth become trees of life, pillars of strength and support, and issue in wide-spreading shelter of praise and aspiration. The tree, with its ubiquitous illustration of these thoughts, has naturally become their lasting symbol. Nor is the essential force of a symbol lost when it is repeated again and again in a pattern like the arcade. In many patterns, however, this inevitable repetition might become uninteresting if it did not give rise to an additional charm by unexpectedly creating an additional form. In Art two and two often make more than four: for instance, if we place two columns with their spandrils, or two trees with their branches, side by side, we make an arch between them which has quite a different character from a column or a tree, and so by raising a long row of columns with their spandrils we get a row of arches, and by planting a lot of trees together a grove.

This bit of witchcraft is especially characteristic of the arcade and the class of ornament to which it gives its name. It is not such a noticeable feature in the spiral, because it is difficult to say what the repeating part of the spiral exactly is; nor in the frieze, where the conditions are quite different. No wonder, then, that mystery envelops the places where this occurs in a marked manner in nature,









XXIII.

ARCADES WHICH EMPHASISE THE COLUMN.

and enhances the eerie charm that wraps our entry into the deepening gloom of a wood. The eclipse of noisy day by silent shade, the change from the vulgar heat and dust of the high road to cool carpets of elastic moss, and the impression of awful, half-seen companionship, amply explain the time-honoured sanctity of groves and the lovely paganism that always clings to them. What harm attends our innocent if superstitious reverence for such temples as these, not made with hands, for those "groves, and streams, and mountain summits which bring the unseen close to man by waving mystery, or by rushing murmur, or by nearness to the height of heaven"? To reject sentiments of this sort, however pantheistic, is to despise the subtlest sources of our inspiration. What may once have been superstition is none the less wonderful and valuable for us when it has consciously become a prolific source of poetry. Art can never be based on enlightened scepticism; nor any science, I trust, expel the lurking ghosts which haunt our fields and teach us to be grateful for their beauty, and kind to the animals and flowers that grow there.

This creation of another form by the juxtaposition of two similar ones, changes the arcade from a line of columns to a row of arches, and suggests greater stress on the decoration of the arch-space than of the columns and spandrils (Plate XXIV.). Other patterns will spring from utilising both spaces, and with this clue the student can well be left to amplify examples for himself. The distinctive quality of the arcade, however, begins to disappear as soon as neither archspace nor column is predominant, and when lines that were meant at first to express lightness combined with strength, or aspiration rooted in knowledge, fade into meandering divisions between ornamental borders which dovetail more or less into each other. The patterns which result from this degradation of the arcade are not, however, necessarily debased; but may serve, so long as they are unaffected, to mark a return to simpler forms of ornament, and illustrate the inevitable sunset of all vital tradition from time to time into the more primitive obscurity of cruder shapes and less tangible expression. In this condition it can compensate for the loss of the maturer thought which an arcade embodies by patterns which show

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XXIV.

ARCADES WHICH EMPHASISE THE ARCH.

contrasts of bright colour, and bold, if somewhat inorganic, forms. It would be somewhat retrogressive to attempt any analysis here of these simpler arcades. The first two patterns in Plate XXV. are sufficient to show their general inclination, and other instances might be quoted from former illustrations; but while the temptation to classify is always a great one, excess of it is apt to aggravate the ever-present difficulties of learning, and only tends to destroy that very simplification which is the aim of all analysis.

From this relapse into archaic simplicity tradition rises like the sun to renewed efforts. Other patterns besides the arcade can be derived from accidental or intentional emphasis on certain curves of the spiral. We saw in Chapter I. that this was a possible source of design, though we were not allowed to draw any patterns then which included organic or animal forms. Now, however, that we are more advanced, let us turn our knowledge into new account. The strange creatures in Plate XXV. are born in this way; and whether they show that the spiral line underlies much of Nature's composition, or that Art is Nature bent into the spiral, does not much matter, for at any rate they afford a clue to the shapes animals take in traditional ornament, a text of which the best efforts of Greek Art are an able exposition. But in these examples, though the animals have made away with the spiral by swallowing it whole, they are still far from possessing the freedom and spontaneity of a true frieze; they are forced to follow each other with the slavish regularity of an university boat crew; they have even less freedom than the leaves in a spiral. But that is because they are the spiral itself metamorphosed, and with its whole soul bent on becoming a frieze as soon as ever it can.

To get into the way of drawing such patterns as these, it will be wiser to begin by drawing the spiral underneath, and building up the forms upon it. That will not only ensure a uniformity in the crew, but will give each member of it his own distinct action and character, in proportion as each up and down stroke of the spiral varies from the next. When this method has been thoroughly assimilated, we may perhaps find it unnecessary to draw the underlying spiral before we settle what sort of creature it is to change into.













XXV.

All animal forms appear to illustrate that double curve whose repetition constitutes the spiral of our tradition. Fishes, birds, quadrupeds, and man himself, stand and move by subtle balancings of corresponding curves, and things are well drawn when they obey this æsthetic law and bend their differing characteristics to illustrate it. Look, for instance, at this picture of a hare painted on the body of an archaic Greek bowl, round which it is supposed to be careering (fig. 15); and notice how entirely the man who drew it felt the music of moving lines, and knew how to make the creature's body harmonise with them. What was not wanted to enforce the feeling of harmonious



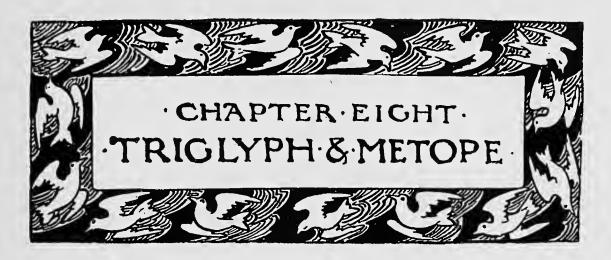
speed he was content to leave out of his picture. He has learnt no anatomy, no foreshortening, and does not want to; he cannot draw half as well as an Academy student, and his chance of benefiting by the patronage of that body would certainly be small; but, for all that, the purpose and power displayed in the drawing of this little beast are worth all the laboured accuracy spent yearly on cumbering the walls of our exhibitions with a lifeless art. Nor does a Greek artist of the period when this hare was painted patronise one type of æsthetic construction in animal life more than another. If he delights in the legs of a hare or deer because they are long and graceful, he is equally sensitive to the short and delicate ones

of the hog, or the short and clumsy ones of a bull. An Aberdeen terrier has stumpy legs, and a greyhound slender ones; both kinds are beautiful, because both are equally fitted to carry the body above them where it wants to go. It is a great pity that Greek artists, in their devotion to the human form, sacrificed so much in its behalf. That is the worst danger of a too exclusive study of the human form—it seems to quench interest in other things. A frieze of leaves may be as perfect, in its way, as the Parthenon frieze, and is much easier; but in Greek Art earlier interests only appear to lead to later developments without being incorporated in them. That is why the earlier and more varied Art possesses a fascination that is lacking in the later. In the beginning they took the keenest interest in everything they could draw, if only snaky dreams of cuttle-fish and flights of emblematic birds. Then, as their power grew, every animal was made to take its place in their designs, and behave itself obediently to their will. Their picture-books were cups and plates, whose brittle clay determined their style, and made it a rapid and decisive one. In such manner, and with such material, they drew every animal they saw or heard of, bird and beast and fowl, in untiring progression, and the promise of a world-wide sympathy seemed theirs. Herakles wrestling with the lion is one of the earliest appearances of the human figure in Greek Art; or perhaps it was the horse which called for his rider. Even then, and for long afterwards—so long, indeed, as the gods and not himself were the chief intelligences—the Greek artist only drew man as one of many actors on a mythical stage, a creature introspectively unconscious, merely a superior sort of animal. But as his faith departs, the animals also fade into prehistoric silence, and he alone holds the whole stage.

This deficiency in his art is still more noticeable in his early rendering of vegetable life, which is such a strong characteristic of all Christian Art from early Gothic to modern landscape. The Greek idea of a tree is far from happy, and reveals a curious blindness to some sides of nature, which it is difficult to understand in face of the subsequent success with which it has been conventionally treated. From this point of view alone, without having recourse to their

architecture for further argument, the arcade is peculiarly a Christian form of ornament, and shows that, however immense the scope of Greek Art may be, it is still a limited one. With less power, our horizon is a wider one because our sympathies are wider also. We have learnt that nothing is despicable—that everything should be duly recognised that affects our lives. Greek artists remain our masters. They followed a quite scientific instinct; and, mastering each difficulty as they came to it, left us in most things a heritage of perfect types. But while they were specialists, we are universalists, and must make use of their discoveries in formulating the expression of our larger creed. If Greek Art could have told us more than it has, it would have been spared to do so. It did its work and died, and we must reap the fuller harvest. We cannot aim at the same ideals, because we have different ones; nor exactly copy their methods, because the way we can say a thing is inseparable from what we have to say. With all love and reverence for the relics of what has passed away, a new art, like a new religion, puts new feelings into new words. Its founders must never allow a prejudice in favour of what is considered classical to prevent even the most immature expression of new thoughts. That is why reformers are generally people of little education and great susceptibility. Culture is essentially conservative, and its persecution of novelty is actuated as often by the bitterness of insulted sentiment as in defence of vested interests.

The greatest reformers are those who combine the appreciation of old traditions with a recognition of the need of new ones; and in such material for revolution the world, at present, is happily rich. No other time has shown such affectionate research side by side with a determination to hazard all, if need be, for the sake of the future. Such a sacrifice as this is happily uncalled for. The eternal, everchanging serpent of civilisation and progress is not writhing in the throes of a premature dissolution, but is only casting his skin, as he has often cast it before. Art flourishes best in a soil that is at the same time cruel and cultivated. The juice of its grape must yield more than mere sparkle and aroma; it must intoxicate us as well with the ecstasy of a new revelation.



YOU will not have forgotten that the two factors of the first fully realised spiral pattern were a waving line and a spot. Under the guidance of this waving line we developed all kinds of spirals, till in the last chapter we felt the evidence of its presence diminish in the evolution of the arcade and its kindred patterns.

Without neglecting the spiral, but rather keeping its vibration more intimately before our imaginations, we will now take up that other factor, the spot, or rather row of spots, and discover what sort of patterns it is the parent of.

In its primitive form, the spots which constitute this pattern must evidently be more or less circular in form, and placed at more or less equal distances from each other. Such an elementary theme has undoubtedly enjoyed a wide popularity, not only on account of its extreme simplicity, but because, like the field of seeds in our first *semé*, it is pregnant with immense possibilities. Let us see in what way.

In the first place, though all the spots are about the same size, they may be as small as peas or as large as pumpkins. Then, though they are at about equal distances apart, that distance may be a great or a small one. Again, they may be oval or angular, and so long as the harmony between them remains unbroken, they may be split up into families or groups of spots. In fact, their possible variations are very numerous, and though we need not stay to investigate them

here, we ought to bear them in mind for convenient reference when we are limited to simple designs. The actual shapes the spots assume calls for attention first, the more because the crafts of wood and stone carving, though they by no means refuse other forms of ornament, have a special interest in simple patterns of this nature.

To explain the reason of this, we must remember that the charm a piece of carving gives us is due, first of all, to its shadows. In this respect the art of carving is in curious contrast with the art of painting. In painting we don't make a real thing, but only the deceptive likeness of one: in carving we make a real thing, but except for Nature, with her lights and shadows, our labour would be thrown away. With a box of colours we can produce something which is quite independent of Nature's help, and that is the great argument for insisting on the importance of a colourist school; but our best efforts in light and shade are poor compared to what Nature can do in that way. She is the great chiaroscurist, and to spend trouble in imitating her easily achieved inimitable results appears to my mind a waste of time.

Such a theory as this, so entirely opposed to modern art teaching, requires a little explanation. Colour has always been the medium of the more imaginative branch of art, while the realists have emphasised the importance of light and shade. It would be impossible, as it would probably be unjust, to condemn a fashion which has been popular for some centuries, nor is it easy to draw a hard-and-fast line between the two schools. A portrait in red chalk, for instance, may be as true to Nature's chiaroscuro as one in black chalk; but it is already, by virtue of the unreality of its colour, ranked in the colour school. What is done for the pleasure that colour gives is of the colour school; what is done for the pleasure an appearance of reality gives belongs to the shadow school. Let us notice, in passing, that the rise of this realistic school is contemporaneous with the decline of handicraft and decoration as fine arts; so that the decorator, whose business it is to reveal dreams and not facts, undoes what he wants to do by trying to make them look solid. His principles ought to coincide with Queen Elizabeth's, who objected to shadows in her

portraits. But the ornamentalist or man of imagination has no objection to carve a sphinx or to model an enigma, if Nature will make them real for him; only we must remember that it is she who fills his corners with gloom and paints the prominences with light. And so if you are a decorator and want chiaroscuro in a pattern, you must carve it. In doing so you will have a legitimate pleasure in the shadows, because they are the result and not the object of your labour. And you will have this advantage also over the pictorial shadow-monger, that your work will have a different effect wherever you put it, while his can never have more than one.

Sculpture, then, is the decorator's chiaroscuro, and the simplest patterns you can carve are often merely variations of a row of spots, and depend on sculpture to add emphasis and interest of shadow to their severe simplicity. They are quite humble patterns, and never venture to take away our attention from the lines of construction, which they are meant to soften and embellish. Everybody knows that when we have to make a thing we must think of construction before ornament, and that when the surface is a large one and the material difficult, we must put up with what will give us the best result for the least trouble. Architecture has been called the mother of the arts, because we first run to her for shelter, and afterwards, in gratitude, try to make her dignified. So patterns like the dogtooth, billet, and ballflower, all instances of very simple friezes, though of no very exalted imaginative order, are full of dignity, because time and experience have approved them, and because they are the firstfruits of a laudable desire to make our homes more than mere roofs over our heads.

I do not intend to stray from our subject, which is the examination of the roots of all design, into such specialised branches as the carving crafts, more than to assign a place in our traditions to these architectural patterns, and to point out how the increasing desire for greater naturalism and more detail is held in healthy check in these professions by the necessity of economy and use—a necessity which is obvious enough when our own comfort is at stake, but which applies with equal force to all the other arts. When its cover

protects the book we are reading without interfering by its weight or costliness with our pleasure, the probabilities are that the book is well bound; and some such obedience to purely material convenience is the first condition of every art. That is an ethical condition. The second is a technical one, that the nature of the material should regulate the nature of the ornament. Here, for instance (fig. 16), is a rough sketch of the first pattern a wood-carver, carving on traditional lines, must learn, because it lies at the root of all his subsequent work. It consists, as you see, of a row of notches like inflated crescents, each one of which ought to be finished in two cuts of a

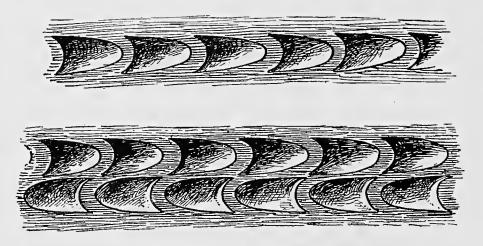


FIG. 16.-FIRST PATTERN IN WOOD-CARVING.

"quick" gouge. It is surprising what a number of patterns can be made out of different combinations of this sort of notch alone, which teachers of carving should set their pupils to do before anything else, because, while it involves no previous knowledge of design, it teaches them to distinguish what patterns are suitable for their craft and what are not; while even in so elementary a stage as this the pleasure such patterns can be made to give depends, as it should, on how much sympathy the pupil has with his material, and how much control he has acquired over his tools.

It always seems strange to me that the builders of our great churches here in England were content for so long with the repetition of a few simple, well tried and proven patterns. Perhaps tradition

is better established by such cautious means, and waits the return of a golden age when every artisan shall be an artist and every artist an artisan. Then I have no doubt every village will boast its traditional and characteristic decoration, and its architecture, public and private, become the open witness of local as well as national imagination. The direction the revival of wood-carving now in vogue has taken is disappointing. A wiser renaissance would point out, first of all, the constructive value of wood, and direct itself to emphasise and praise this function of it; but instead of trying to reform the deadly rule-of-thumb insipidity of carpenters' gothic and carpenters' classic by rough incisive sculpture on barge-boards, lintels, beams, balusters, and newels, or in more delicate patterns in intaglio or light relief on solid furniture, the ingenuity of the teacher and the patience of the pupil are spent on the elaboration of realistic and arabesque designs, which show no signs of that moral enthusiasm which we look for in any real renaissance. Such carving robs the timber of its strength, and at best can only be made up into bric-à-brac, of which every one who is in earnest is profoundly sick. Art is but a chapter, though a large one, of economics. manufacture of useless articles, with never so much skill, is savage and uncivilised, and prophesies inevitable catastrophe. If sometimes we are inclined to regret the loss of accumulated treasure at the Reformation or during any outburst of religious enthusiasm, we should console ourselves with learning the lessons these ebullitions of strong sentiment enforce, and pay greater attention to the not unsacred claims of domestic art. When the chalice and reliquary are sacrificed to religious fanaticism, the tankard and cupboard are spared; and though all things in everyday use are liable to be broken and wornout, their death is but a natural one, and their decay full of beauty and honour. But a work of high art, which demands service instead of rendering it, naturally excites the cupidity of the conqueror or the wrath of the iconoclast, and we cannot help regarding its fate more in the light of a massacre than a martyrdom.

The main characteristic of these architectural patterns is the repetition at even distances of a boss, incision, or simple ornament,

which redeems its monotony by the addition of shadow. It does not at all follow that the most beautiful objects are the most suitable for repetition. As in the case of designing diapers or stencils, the law holds good that the more dignified a thing is, the more ridiculous its repetition will, as a rule, become. So that it follows that simple friezes of this kind, including those which are suitable for carving, are best composed of some such simple themes as occur in Plates XXVI. and XXVII., which break the surface pleasantly, and interest the worker without committing him to any intellectual responsibility. If you want to carve or paint more important friezes of this kind, you must constantly and very considerably alter the details in the object you repeat; but that is a part of the subject we shall presently come to.

Of course, a characteristic of most friezes, especially in these carlier architectural ones, is the blank space between each member which emphasises the shadow of it. Very often an inferior decorator, to avoid the difficulty of having to draw or carve the same thing differently every time, will exactly repeat one factor of his pattern at such a distance from its first occurrence that he hopes you won't notice his repetition. This is, of course, as much as to say that he does not think his pattern worth looking at carefully. The humblest pattern in the world is dignified if it varies throughout; the most ambitious is spoilt if two inches of it are identical.

Where we cannot be original throughout, it is better to adopt an unpretentious pattern, where the repetition is obvious and excusable, as in most of the examples in Plates XXVI. and XXVII. These themes are all very simple, and seldom attempt any greater variation than the accidents of drawing admit. Under the conditions of Gothic architecture they tend to crystallise into various forms of rosette, but we need not limit the scope of this form of ornament to such a narrow destination. In pottery, weaving, and many other arts, such simple patterns have of course no pretence of relief, and depend for their effect on colour or quaintness of design. As our illustrations have neither the charm of colour nor of shadow, they cannot do these patterns justice; but I let them stand in the hope -

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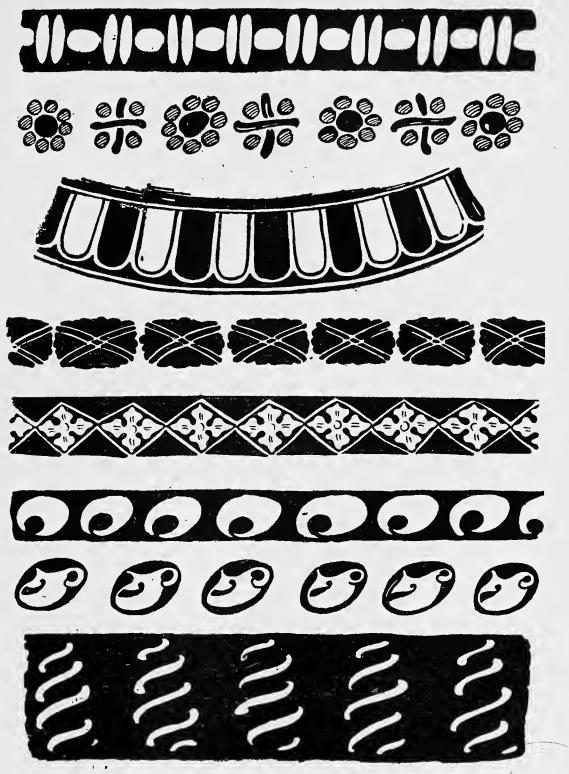


XXVI.

VARIATIONS OF THE FIRST FRIEZE OR ROW OF SPOTS.

that they may suggest other applications than the ones I have taken them from. The regular sequence of plain triglyph and carved metope in a Greek frieze is the highest pitch to which a pattern of this kind can climb. The excellence or elaboration of the carving in each metope must not prevent us from seeing the simplicity of the whole scheme of pattern of which each metope is only a dependent factor. If the subject in every panel were a different one, this simplicity would be greatly marred; but where, as pre-eminently in the Parthenon, Centaur crushes Lapith, and Lapith conquers Centaur, the vibration of a real pattern is maintained, and the spirit of the spiral preserved intact. In spite of any individual excellence in their workmanship or intention, these intermittent friezes, as we might call them, must not be confused with the final form of frieze the study of them leads us to. The principle of these depends on the alternation of a plain, or nearly plain, factor with a more ornamented one, or even with the alternation of two different factors of which it might be difficult to say which is the more important.

The fundamental composition of almost every good pattern is really very simple; and nothing illustrates this better than the row of metopes and tryglyphs which compose the frieze of the Parthenon. Here is perhaps the finest sculpture in the world, though it is only, after all, an exercise on the simplest theme in existence; and I make bold to say that its excellence is due first of all to its being entirely subservient to the structural tradition or necessity of its position. The artist is a mason under the orders of the architect before he is anything else. The infinity of his imagination is circumscribed by inexorable limits. That is why his work is delightful, useful, and comprehensible. This simplicity and service underlies all Art. "Here is your metope-sculpture it; your box-carve it; your platepaint it; your curtain—embroider it; your house—make it homely." In doing so you will find your spiritual needs have also been catered for, unconsciously, which is perhaps the only condition on which you can get them really satisfied; but to teach people to paint and carve as an end in itself is to give carte blanche to original sin. The beginning of all education is obedience; the end of it, it seems



XXVII.

EARLY INORGANIC FRIEZES.

to me, is still obedience. Without the support of principle every effort is limp. Tradition is principle, and the study of it discloses the foundations on which all real Art rests. Here (fig. 17), for

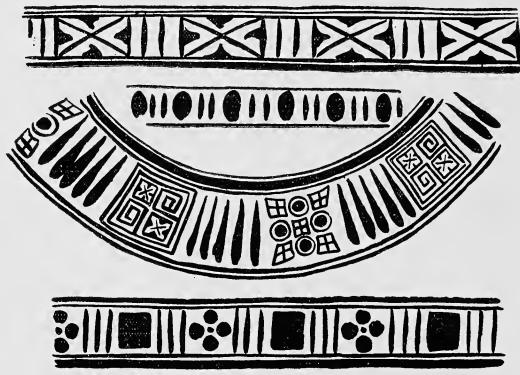
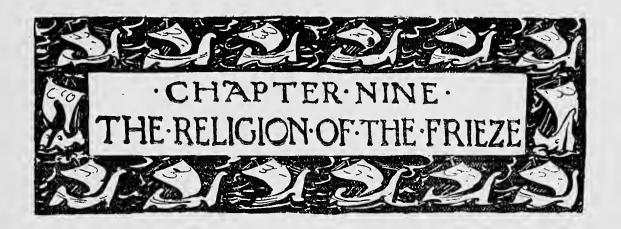


FIG. 17.-ANCESTORS OF THE PARTHENON FRIEZE.

instance, are some of the actual ancestors of the Parthenon metopes; and though none of us, now-a-days, will think them very interesting, we must learn to value the lesson they can teach us if we are anxious to emulate Greek proficiency, or establish our own friezes on eternal stones.



THERE is a squareness about classical decoration as shown by the metopes in a Greek frieze, the Perpendicular style in our own architecture, and the ultimate reduction of modern Art into the picture, which appears somehow incompatible with any further evolution. Crystallisations assume an angularity which continuous motion abhors. The planets revolve in ellipses, but freeze into fixed stars. Anyhow, a tradition of Art which is on the move prefers rounded forms to rectangular ones, and if we want to find a principle of growth in our friezes for to-day, we must take as our basis a row of curved spots rather than square ones.

But this is not all. Your curved forms will not budge till they are unsymmetrical, as even your straight lines can be made to move by placing them all awry (fig. 18). And this awryness cannot properly be taught, for however crooked your lines are they ought to balance each other, and while you are weighing them the restless spirit has flown. That is why I say that all good Art must be spontaneous. Its business is to transmit motion. A Gothic cathedral flames its soul into the sky, while Salem chapel grovels in bricks and mortar. Each affects the quality of its day to aspiration or depression.

Now, in itself, a row of spots or buttons is not a style of ornament of high emotional value, and very few of the friezes in our last chapter have any but a static and contentedly placid expression;

nor does a line of Greek metopes, nor Gothic moulding of rosettes, nor parapet of English battlements, leave us with that unsatisfied desire which accompanies progressive art. These forms of decoration have a mission, and fulfil it, but there is another sort of Greek frieze which is less monotonous, and other Gothic ornaments besides rosettes; so in this chapter we will take up our row of spots once more, but

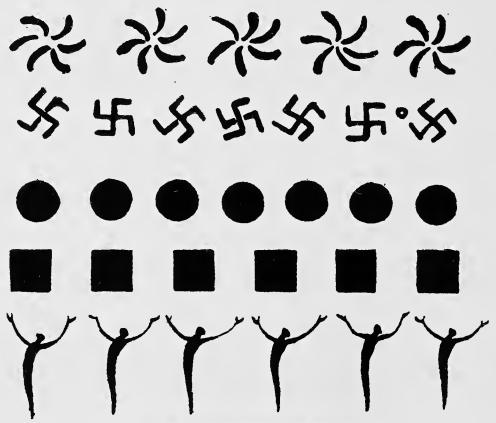
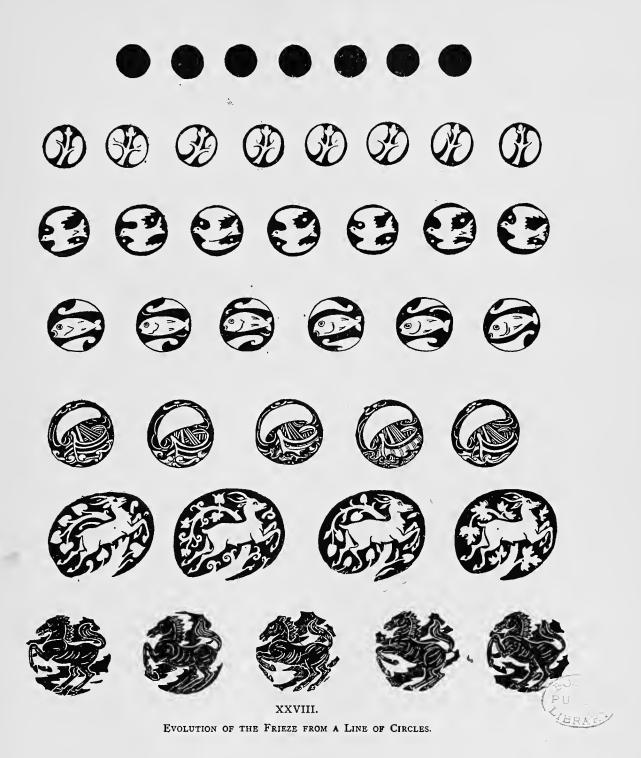


FIG. 18.—DYNAMIC, STATIC, AND ESTATIC.

this time on the condition that they shall pass before us like a regiment on the march, and not like a line of soldiers standing at ease. There is, however, a sort of frieze which comes half-way between the entirely free one and that restricted kind which we have already studied. In Plate XXVIII. I have tried to show how it may be derived from the primary row of circles. The wheels, rosettes, and stars of the elementary architectural friezes are only modifications of the circle itself, but in these patterns the ornament is planted like a



picture inside its frame, as a god or monarch's head is relieved on a coin instead of being cut out of the solid metal. This difference allows us, of course, a far greater scope of subject, and in the later stages of its evolution the picture may be sufficiently complex and globular to dispense with the frame altogether. We shall not reach this goal without considerable practice, because it is much more difficult to draw a picture that will look more or less circular when it is finished, than to put two or three things together into a circular frame, and fill up the background with black. The function of the frame must remain even after it has been taken away; and however rampant the figures may be, they must remain distinctly independent and separate from each other. We must make them harmonise as simple masses with simple outlines before we look to see what they are made up of. This is, of course, more or less true of all friezes; but while in the earlier and simpler kinds the masses are kept conventionally and rigidly distinct, in the latter more delicate relations are introduced, and instead of each member of the frieze standing alone, it is so nervously sensitive to the others that it affects the attitudes of all.

These are the friezes that must interest us now. They are free from such rigid conventions as affected those we have just studied, or the architectural ones of the last chapter, of which we took the Greek frieze of metope and triglyph as a type. They must therefore obey all the more faithfully those unwritten traditions of harmony which it appears to be the aim of the neo-idealists, with their Japanese and Javanese tendencies, to outrage. In other words, they must satisfy our Christian prejudices for a proper adjustment of weight and shadow, or of colour and form, over the whole surface: must, in fact, make for peace and righteousness instead of discord and anarchy. The first step we must take in this direction is to give a semblance of motion to the whole row of spots, instead of leaving them placidly inert. From this point of view they will appear as a line of irregular and lopsided ovals (fig. 19). Then we must bring them nearer together, in order to get rid of that blank space, which has hitherto been necessary to alternate with the recurrent ornament and give

it due relief and prominence. These ovals must for the present all point in the same direction. We may sometimes finish off a frieze, as we ended a spiral, with a figure or leaf turned the other way, but in the frieze it has a special value, and emphasises the direction in which the procession has gone; as children will draw a ship scudding before the wind, and think to emphasise the motion by streaming an impossible pennon windward in the teeth of the gale.

Now these ovals are, so to speak, eggs from which in ingenious incubators we may hatch any animal we choose. It is a shape that underlies the construction of every creature, and helps us very materially to draw them. It will be best to set about it in the solidest manner we can, with a stump brush or a quill pen that has seen better days. When that is done, you can modify and add to it the special characteristic of the animal you want, and as far as possible in the



Fig. 19

same solid way; thinking of the head as another and smaller oval, and the neck, legs, wings and tail as isthmuses and peninsulas.

It is wonderful, too, what a feeling of vigour and reality this method of drawing is capable of giving, if it is only adopted in a courageous manner. Our greatest difficulty in producing typical forms is to make them simple enough, for it is only simple things that novices can remember easily enough to reproduce. What we want to see are the broad masses and simple actions of things. What, as a matter of fact, nine out of ten of us do see are only their details. The eye is ever flying to points. We take the broad masses of things for granted, as we learn to walk and eat without question; but when we come to abstract them from their thousand minor points of interest, the task is not an easy one. I should double my undertaking if I were to try and analyse this process of elimination, and discover the essential types underlying the varieties of every genus. The Greeks did it: did it more or less in their childhood,

before they began to draw. You cannot do better than study their methods. Their process was the opposite of the present popular one. The modern method is to construct the whole from the parts. They began with a generalisation, and only admitted details that agreed with their conception of what the whole should be like.

Our way is, of course, the scientific one. We learn a great number of more or less interesting facts; but our deductions from them are not necessarily true, and are certainly more often candid than poetical. After all, they are more portraits and specimens than types. A type is neither the least nor the greatest common measure of many instances, but an ideal from which each instance varies in a greater or less degree. This ideal cannot be discovered any more than truth can,-it can only be guessed. The Greeks made capital guesses: true ones, so far as they have been of excellent service ever since; so if you only want to design good patterns, and not to exhibit at the Royal Academy, nor spend time and money over elaborate works on anatomy, which are falsely called "artistic," but are really only horrid, remember Professor Ruskin's advice to a portrait painter, never to look at a skull but to see how unlike a head it is, and believe that Nature has repeated in her creatures the balance and proportion which the artist's instinct demands. The oval or egg-shaped form corresponds as a rule to the chest or thorax of every animal, while the neck and head, the fore and hinder limbs and the tail are secondary offshoots, which harmonise and contrast in their curves with its mass, realising its activity and conscience (fig. 20). We are so far behind the Greeks in the elementary principles of decoration that it is impossible to comprehend the many feelings which combine to constitute their style. As in all traditions, it is easy to trace in their art evidences of realistic as well as ideal tendencies: the most conservative fidelity to received types often occurs hand-in-hand with minute observation of detail. We discover a lion with legs as slender as an antelope's; and yet the artist will take care to mark the wrinkles in his forehead when the monarch of the desert frowns. He notices the clumsy hoofs, the ponderous neck, the corrugated dewlap, and the angry bent in the tail of the

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XXX.

FRIEZES.

clever and more ambitious hands they soon become more entangled, to show how skilfully he can manage the perspective of his horses four abreast, or regiments of soldiers with long lines of overlapping shields creeping in stealthy ambuscade, or stern in vigilant defence. I need not illustrate such technical triumphs as these. The student who has reached sufficient proficiency to attempt such achievement will not come to me for any help. Where the palpable signs of traditional regulations cease, our task ends too; but if we want to climb to giddy heights let us never forget to confess in what we do the underlying links which bind our work to the past, and fit it to help the Art that is to come. The feelings which the spiral expresses must be more prominent now than they ever were—the frieze must live from end to end, the heroes in it merged in the battle or lost in the rush of the race.

With the enfranchised frieze we have reached the end of one of the main branches of the traditional tree. The ultimate goal of tradition will always elude us, but this is one of those culminations which Fate allows a favourite era. For us, too, who hold a creed of "all for each, and each for all," the frieze in these days should claim to be adopted as a significant form of decoration, because at bottom that is its meaning. It is not the only form of Art, any more than democracy is the only form of government, but it is as true a principle of ornament, in its way, as that other which groups its members round a central figure. All forms of Art reflect one facet or another of our life and aspirations.

The subjects most suitable for a frieze are, from its nature and shape, mainly processional. The flight of birds, the solemn march of geese, the light gallop of deer, or stampede of horses: the triumph, the march, the battle. Such ideas as these flash at once into our minds and throw a gleam of insight on the connection between our Art and our life. Here is a fleet of fishing-boats creeping in the dusk silently out of the harbour's mouth, lanthorns lighted and hanging from the bows; now they return on the top of the tide, with a broader gleam on their glistening sails. In the meadows a line of reapers sway to the scythe, and the flowers of the field fall

before the deputies of death. There are festivals with stately ritual, civic as well as religious. Ceremony still lingers where strong interests or emotions are involved, and we cannot be baptised, married, or buried without paying some public tribute to general sentiment. Wherever, in fact, several people have to share the same feelings in any of the functions, duties, or pleasures of life, there lie suggestions for that sort of artistic expression which is commonly called the frieze.

The simpler forms of Art, spiral and arcade, reflect little more than what we may all see, or echo in our dreams, of the wide world of Nature around us; but when this external vision, with its happy irresponsibility, fails to satisfy us completely; when, after naming every beast in his paradise, man's eye is turned inwards on himself, and all he sees is coloured by this new point of view; still more when his eyes are opened to the claims of society, and he finds his own interests merged in that of others; then the question arises how his Art is to reflect this change. And I think I am justified in believing that it is answered by that conventional and artificial way of treating and arranging things which in every branch of human energy and science is called Tradition, a way which has now become strangely discredited and, in the fine arts, only lingers in poor repute under the name of "composition," and is rapidly yielding to a fashion that denies any obligation to the customs of the past. Such a change is of course inevitable, and hardly to be regretted, if the tradition is too weak to assert itself; and yet when the composition fades from the picture, unless there is something stronger to take its place, the house of Art must fall in ruins. No return to Nature alone can build up Art again. Nature is not Art. I have never seen the original of that celebrated picture of a reindeer, scratched by a prehistoric cave-man of the bone age on a mammoth's tusk; but judging by the admiration that every text-book on Art has for this relic, which it thinks it necessary to reproduce for our edification and benefit, it is evident that a precocious genius was born before his time, or else that history strangely repeats itself, and that the artistic ideals of our end of the nineteenth century and of this unknown

impressionist coincide in a wonderful way. Both are untrammelled by any conservative interference, and both are exceedingly clever; but for the sentiment that centuries of thought and feeling ought to give, we may look to either in vain. Surely it is, after all, when you drive the question home, the power of giving us civilised feelings, and noble and kindly thoughts, that distinguishes good work, however immature, from barbarous work, however clever and modern.

The frieze, as one of the final forms of Art, is necessarily the exponent of many ideas which have become inseparable from our ideas of civilised life. All men, whether they will or no, are metaphysicians, and write their religion or their philosophy in everything they do. Since Art starts with being a compromise, there must be a grain of subjectivity in the most objective examples of it. On the other hand, we must never think that a work of art is great because its meaning is misty. Truths which are so obscure that they are called mysteries, have necessarily to be clothed in occult—that is to say, special and unusual language; and advocates are not wanting to-day to claim virtue for vagueness and privilege for impertinence. But when a wise man who has had an experience, or found something out which he thinks may interest or benefit his fellow-creatures, wants to tell it to them, he tries to say it in the clearest possible way. If it has never been said before, he is obliged to coin new words to say it in, and if only a few people can understand what he says, the fault is not always to be laid to his door. That is the only occultism under the sun. Truth cannot harm any one who can understand it. Indeed, it is in the way of evolution that what is magical to-day is the common-place of to-morrow. Tradition is the mint where the exact symbols are struck to meet the wants of our deeper thoughts, that they may haply pass into current coin. In despising tradition our art and science has robbed the world of many symbols that once were useful to it, but it cannot alter the essential conditions of our life, and we shall find ourselves, after all, driven to reclothe the statements of its mysteries in words and colours that will dignify their subject. We cannot endure life and shirk all

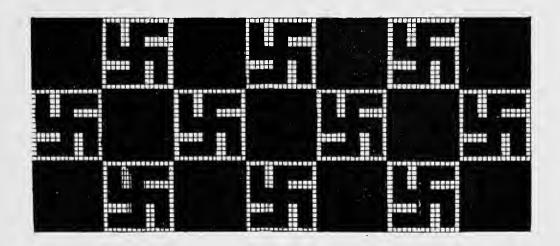
how it consists of a mosaic of rectangular tesseræ with their sides parallel to the warp and woof. All patterns in textiles must be constructed in this arbitrary and laborious manner, on a rectangular basis. You cannot weave a real curve, any more than you can take a circular drive through the streets of New York. You must approximate to the direction you want to go, by the nearest zigzag. That is to say, we must often conform to necessarily geometrical conditions, but the value of our pattern will finally depend on making the best possible use of those conditions, or on transcending them at the same time that we admit them. Here, as always, the best design is the one that shows the greatest intelligence. The former of the two examples (Plate XXXI.) is entirely limited by its conditions. It is not in consequence a bad pattern, but is quite innocent and useful so long as it is kept in subordinate positions, and doesn't pretend to be anything else. But the other, on the contrary, has evidently something it wants and tries to say, in spite of a natural impediment, so that we can put it where it is more likely to be seen, because the prominence that is given to a pattern should be in proportion to its beauty, or, which is the same thing, to the amount of intelligence it displays. A geometrical pattern is generally out of place in an important position, because with not much more labour better results are possible, and if the eye is attracted to one spot, it likes to be amused and not wearied there. There are certain patterns with delightfully traditional names, such as Munkabälte and Ophemta, well known to the revivers of hand-woven linen, which, though entirely geometrical, are perfectly legitimate, because they are only variations of the ordinary weaving on a hand-loom. When the proper adjustment of treadles and headle-sticks has once been made, these patterns come, so to speak, of themselves, and require very little more attention from the hand-weaver than what is wanted for the plainest web. It is only when time is wasted on producing uninteresting instead of interesting effects, that we are justified in condemning the pattern. The most complicated mechanical contrivances are justifiable if they will reproduce a good design; none, to help us make machines of of our own souls. In that dreadfully geometrical chip-carving,

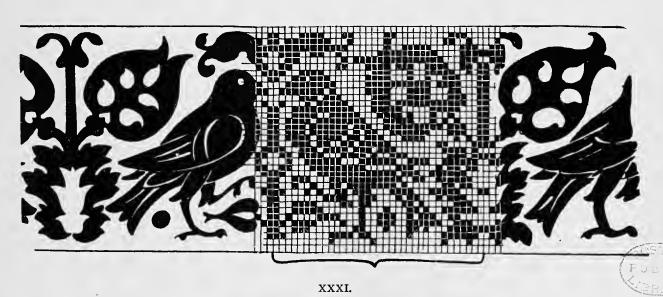
for instance, the most finished labour produces exactly the worst, because the most mechanical, result. Who wants to attune his music to the beat of a piston? The artist ought always to aim higher than he can execute. And not only the artist. If you can teach a plough-boy such technical patience that he can drive his gouge with the precision of a plough, you can also teach him to follow finer furrows in the oak. The very best art must always be technically imperfect; but such a mechanical ideal as this of chip-carving can be realised as completely as the five-finger exercise, and be every bit as dead. Remember, then, that geometrical patterns are occasionally useful when they are not to take important positions, and that machinery is only important when it will help our imaginations.

The spiral, itself the embodiment of artistic, that is to say of imaginative endeavour, taught us first to vivify lines while we are limited to lines, and then to fill their curves and corners with suitable occupants; and what we have to learn to do now is to fill flat spaces in the same way with interesting lines or objects.

That is the problem before us,—how to make an indefinite space beautiful and not blank; and this problem is at once complicated by the possibility of our being obliged to divide it into arbitrary and geometrical partitions for the easier manufacture of the pattern on it; so that the first question we have to settle is, whether in cases of this sort it is better to conceal such divisions or show them,—a question which very seriously affects the arts of designing repeating patterns for such things as wall-papers, tapestry, printed cottons, and carpets, which are generally made by machines.

Let us take care not to confuse all machines in one sweeping condemnation. Some machines are always necessary—such as carts, ploughs, wheelbarrows, clocks, and scissors; others are, at any rate, convenient and not degrading, such as sewing-machines, tramcars, and bicycles. All these depend, of course, on animal force to set them in motion. Then there is a class of machine which depends on the powers of the elements, such as windmills and water-mills; and others, again, which depend on steam and electricity; and I dare say these are not the only imprisoned jinns we shall find capable





PATTERNS FOR WEAVING ON THE HAND-LOOM.

of becoming our slaves in time. So we must pause before we associate the idea of a machine with an exclusive worship of mammon, or even with a tall chimney above and a thumping clatter below.

Machines are only bad when they do more harm than good; and it is not always easy to see what good some machines may do, nor to realise the amount of evil they are capable of. At any rate, the conditions of civilisation, and the growth of our control over external energy, are so complicated and so formidable, that it would be impossible to check them all at once by the mere expression of disapprobation. All inventions and institutions are natural outcomes of certain states of mind: it is not the thing invented which is to be praised or blamed, but the quality of thought which called it into existence. Let us find out which factor in machinery it is that is possibly detrimental to our greater happiness, and address ourselves to counteract the causes of it. Now, what has made machinery of the tall-chimney type especially obnoxious to sensitively artistic constitutions is not its money-making propensity—for even artists have no objection to making money when they can-but the monotonously regular and dead-alive standard of perfection it continually strives to produce.

Such an ideal must always be opposed to the artistic one; but artists have no one to blame but themselves if they have allowed machinery to become associated with what is practical, and their own work with what is only æsthetic. How can we blame the Philistines for adopting what we have deserted? and if we really possess superior taste, which is the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong in these matters, it is we who ought first of all to understand, and then to prove by that example which is so much better than precept, what things hands can do better than machines, and whether, finally, the machine is to obey the brain, or everybody's intelligence, except the inventor's, to work as the machine directs them.

Let us take the subject of wall-papers, for example, because they have a wide-spread use, and apparently supply a want most of us feel, or have been persuaded into thinking we feel. Wall-papers

have passed through curious fashions, reflecting, naturally enough, since they surround us so closely and intimately, all the moods we have travelled through ourselves. There are the French and the classical moods, the Pompeian and the sham-marble moods; and later the fairy-tale, the severe and chaste, and the flamboyant and rococo moods. Just at present varieties of a parrot tulip pattern hold the field; and the designers who invent them do their best to conceal the necessary repetition of the design—a pure waste of their ingenuity, for we all know now that the pattern has to be repeated, and are only worried till we find out where and how it does so.

The more like Nature a design is, the less, as a rule, it ought to be repeated. It does not affect the commercial value of a celebrated picture to be accurately copied, but if you put the original picture and a copy of it side by side on the wall of your drawing-room, you destroy the æsthetic value of both. If you were to cover your walls with copies of one picture your friends would think you were mad, but if you choose the latest thing in artistic wall-papers they will applaud your taste. And yet the design has been repeated in the wall-paper just as much as it would have been in the case of the picture. The reduplication of the latter is patently ridiculous, because a picture is supposed to resemble Nature, and we know that Nature never repeats herself; while the truth is that we excuse the same thing in the wall-paper simply because we don't think the design interesting enough to be noticeable: if the design were a really good one I am sure the artist would not wish to conceal it, but would prefer its obvious repetition. The reasons for the present strange state of things are, firstly, that the designer having taken service under a machine is obliged to repeat his design; and, secondly, that he can only base his designs on Nature, and knowing that Nature never repeats herself, he tries, vainly as we see, to make you think it does not repeat. His excuse is, of course, the usual plea for "breadth and general effect." Now there are only two ways of obtaining a "general effect": one is to shut your eyes, and keep them shut; and the other is to whitewash your walls. You cannot

anyhow design an "effect"; you can only produce one by designing several things and putting them together. The "general effect" of South Kensington Museum, for example, is one of intense oppression and ennui, got by collecting a lot of very ugly things and some very beautiful ones under the same roof.

Since, to-day, we are to a great extent the slaves of machines, we shall have to put up with mechanical repetitions of designs, though we must always be ready to rebel against this tyranny by substituting repetition by hand; but while it is wrong to repeat a picture which is meant to resemble Nature, it is not wrong, but quite right, to repeat designs which are based on the imagination of the artist,—only their repetition in that case must be obvious and straightforward.

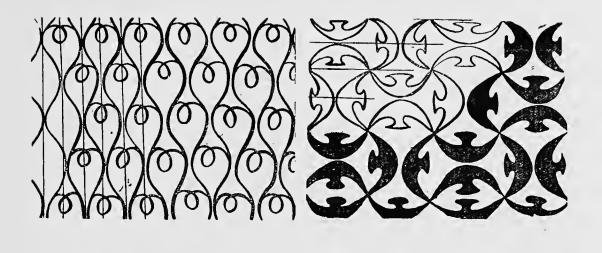
In repetition itself, then, there is no great harm: the mischief lies in trying to hide the repetition when, as is often the case, it is necessary or advisable. Sometimes, in spite of an obvious repetition, it is difficult to discover where the design actually leaves off and begins again. This is noticeably the case in some exquisite Italian brocades and silk tissues of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, exhibited at South Kensington Museum, and which on a very fine day you may be able to find if you have good eyes and plenty of patience. In many of these examples a "general effect" is obtained by covering the whole ground with the design, repeating it in the same way that I condemn in our modern floral wall-papers; only in these it is legitimate, because there is no attempt to hide the existence of a very marked design, while somehow or other it seems that the modern designer has no central idea which he wishes to show, but is only bent on muddling half a dozen inanities together. I think our inability to compete with the repeating designs of those earlier days is partly owing to our incapacity for understanding what a really serious thing "grotesque" art is. Perhaps our imaginations are weak; anyhow, we have got it into our heads that all serious art must be naturalistic, and all grotesque art comic. In this latter and purely frivolous sort we are clever enough, but it is popular because no one for a moment supposes it is meant to

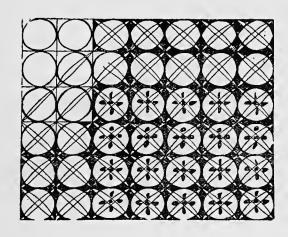
be serious. And this fallacious distinction prevents our producing any great decorative art, because all great decorative work must be grotesque in a large sense—that is to say, it must be non-natural and imaginative. The unfortunate British public defines the imagination as something it can "shriek with laughter at," and so long as we teach our artists that their duty is to imitate Nature, our appreciation of the grotesque will be regulated by the annals of Ally Sloper, and the divine comedy of Art remain a sealed book for us. Nor can its place be taken by the empty-headed and empty-hearted twirligigs of late Renaissance ornament, which only flatter our skill to make us forget the beauty of simple forms, and prevent us taking any real steps towards a genuine reformation of design by disgusting us with what an unbridled imagination can perpetrate. The cheap machine-facture of printed stuffs, and the hopeless profusion of them, has pandered to our frantic haste to cover everything we have or make with something else, and that something with a pattern. We are so accustomed to seeing patterns on everything about us that you will often meet people who say that it is surely better for poor people, who cannot afford to buy hand-made things, to have machinemade patterns rather than none at all. Now, we have admitted that there are plenty of patterns, and quite harmless ones too, that a machine can turn out quite nicely, and that are within the means of most people; and, for the rest, we can only answer that plain surfaces are infinitely superior to badly decorated ones. No revival of good ornament is possible, machine or no machine, till the value of simplicity has been thoroughly learnt; and the rapid output of machine-made patterns is mainly responsible for our lack of taste, because it first persuades us that bombastic decoration is sublime, and then supplies us with the wretched stuff. Nothing could be in really better taste, because nothing could be in happier answer to acknowledged want, than a row of burnished dish-covers on the kitchen wall. When "nine and twenty knights of fame hung their shields in Branksome Hall" the effect must have been very similar, and as useful to the needs of the day. Now, our taste is better shown in the kitchen, where we sternly subordinate ornament to use,

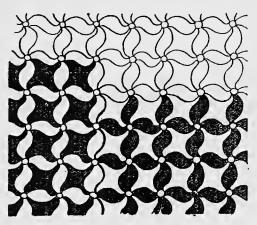
than in the parlour, which we blight with a plague of *bric-à-brac*. It is better, if you cannot make a picture of your wall, to keep it severely chaste; but if you must have a wall-paper, at any rate choose an old-fashioned one, where nursery associations plead for a not harmful diaper of little bouquets of flowers and ribbons, with a butterfly or two, and by good chance a bird. This cannot compete with the grandiloquence of modern design, but may still sprinkle our thoughts with innocent memories and suggestions.

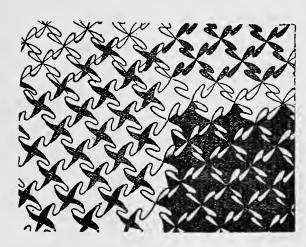
The necessity for a frank confession of the extent of the design applies equally to patterns that are suitable for tapestries and carpets, or anything which is to be looked at in an extended position. No attempt should be made to conceal the repetition in them, and the artist should concentrate his strength on the centre of his design, instead of smearing it over the edges in the futile endeavour to deceive the eye. Indeed, I think it will be better, as a rule, to keep the design entirely distinct from its repeat where the surface is to be covered with figures only, and not complicated by lines as well. This is especially the case with drapery, where, as it is intended to fall into folds, the design will seldom be seen entire, and consequently its repetition will run less risk of appearing irksome.

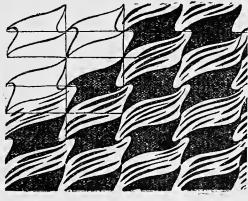
Now, there are three main divisions into which the decoration of a surface of indefinite extent can fall. The first is the diaper, in which the ground is entirely netted over with intersecting lines or geometrical figures which, with the ornaments inside them, may be more or less involved and elaborate. The second is the semé, in which the ground is spotted, at more or less regular intervals, with isolated ornaments. The third is the arabesque, where the ground is neither netted nor spotted, but chased with gracefully curving lines often symmetrically, but seldom geometrically disposed. A diaper is like a chessboard with a piece on each square, or the map of a new country divided into formal provinces, with the chief town of each in the middle of it; a semé is like a Sahara studded with island oases; and an arabesque winds over its ground like a great and sinuous river. If the diaper is our friend the line and the spot, multiplied and adapted in order to decorate a surface, then the semé











XXXII.

is the freer adaptation of the spot without the line, and the arabesque the freer adaptation of the line without the spot (fig. 21).

I place the diaper first, because although it is capable of wonderful elaboration and freedom, its beginnings are of the simplest nature, and its most ambitious aims always and visibly limited by geometrical conditions, while the other two begin by revolting against geometry, and lose themselves in infinite possibilities. Indeed, it is difficult, as I have suggested, to define the content of possible arabesque, which, commencing with and always retaining the dominant note of a sinuous line, recruits itself from every possible quarter, and bids defiance to every possible law.

It is, of course, absurd to draw a hard and fast line between

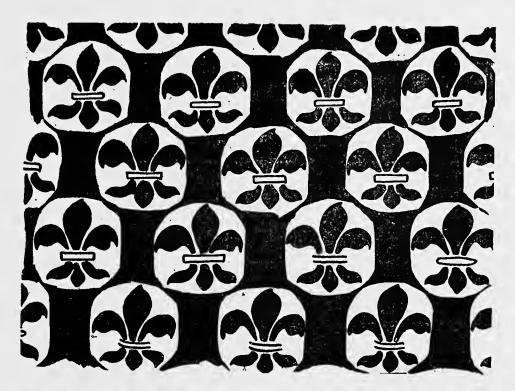


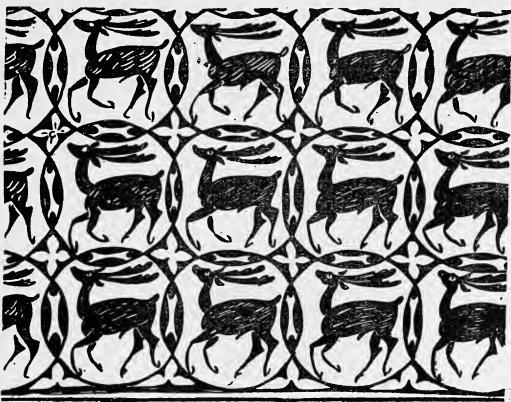


these three divisions; but the above classification will, I hope, be sufficiently radical to help us to some insight into the vast and complicated mass of material this aspect of our subject brings us into touch with.

These three forms of ornament, the diaper, semé, and arabesque, have one characteristic in common: they all tend to cover the ground evenly—that is to say, no great part of it is unduly emphasised at the expense of the rest; and we must treat of them at this stage in our tradition, because later developments of the spiral abandon this principle and aim at a more centralised or pictorial effect.

Since diapers and semés have both a geometrical foundation, they have been easily captured by modern methods of cheap manufacture, with the usual result of blinding and balking the real exercise of





XXXIII.
Typical Diapers.

the imagination, because competing manufacturers must make the figures of their diapers and the sizes and distances of their semés mathematically accurate, while in the best examples of both the details would constantly vary in every repetition.

In arranging a diaper or a semé for mechanical repetition these mathematical restrictions must be obeyed; but what I want to point out is that the machine did not invent the pattern, but is only a means of imitating it; and that the real exercise of the imagination is always opposed to any mechanical practice, and is always trying to achieve something you did not expect, instead of, like a machine, something you do.

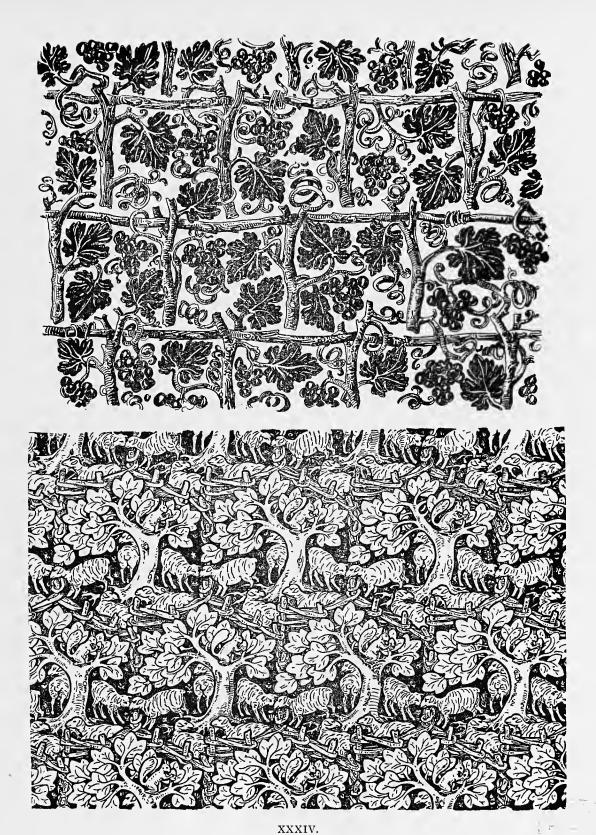
Though a diaper is converted into a semé by the removal of its lines, it does not follow that this is a usual or advisable method. On the contrary, perhaps the greatest difference between these two forms of decoration lies in the character of the ornaments which compose them. The geometrical divisions of a diaper often admit a more organic, or at least a more elaborate and complicated form of ornament than is suitable for a semé. A diaper frames the pictures of which it is composed. But you must not therefore think that the best diaper is composed of the most elaborate figures; because a very rigid relation should exist between the importance of the design and the number of times it may be repeated. A picture gallery, for example, is a very good instance of a badly decorated room. If you have a large space to cover, your ornaments should be humble in proportion to their number. The simplest method of covering a space is generally the most effective one, for the same reason that where no decoration at all is wanted every sort of ornament is out of place. But at present all we need remember is that a diaper tends to frame its members, and a semé to set them free. Each method has its own special duty and value; the one of a carefully picked and arranged bouquet, the other of a field full of wild flowers.

The range of legitimate diapers extends from the merely pleasant fretting of a surface with figures made by the intersection of lines and curves, to the introduction of isolated ornaments into these figures, and finally to patterns which consist of designs without indeed any dividing lines, but which touch and repeat each other on every side.

As with the first forms of frieze, the first kind of diaper is perhaps best illustrated in the carved fretting of broad surfaces of stone, where, especially because the surface by its mere size must attract attention, it is well to recollect that a geometrical basis does not involve a mechanical execution. The fret should vary over all its extent, if it is to please our eyes, with here a deeper or shallower notch, and there a thinner or broader line: not that this is to be achieved on purpose, so to speak, but with the "careful carelessness" of a hand that is happy at its labour. Plate XXXII. is sufficiently illustrative of diapers of this class composed entirely of lines. I do not want to dwell on them here. Their name is legion, and their invention more ingenious than imaginative. It is quite easy to find out how to do them, or you will find them amply illustrated in Japanese and other handbooks that deal with the dry bones of ornament. They are fascinating in their way, though the best of them are generally the simplest, and are mechanically useful if we do not let them blind us to more vital forms of ornament. If we draw these diapers by hand, instead of with ruler and compasses, the natural thickening of the downstrokes here and there will often suggest solid forms, which the imagination will soon begin to enforce and lead us on to do diapers composed of solid forms as well as of lines. We reach the same result by filling some of the interstices between the intersecting lines with colour, and the student will profitably discover what entirely dissimilar effects can be obtained in this way from a single original. So that next to these fretted diapers come those composed of spots as well as lines, of conventional ornaments as well as figures, which I consider especially typical of the whole class of diapers, of which the two in Plate XXXIII. are very simple examples. It would, of course, be quite hopeless to attempt any review of their infinite varieties; the simplest are very often the most satisfactory, but that of course depends on what you want to decorate.

Lastly, there are the diapers in which the ground is covered with contiguous ornaments alone, while the lines themselves are absent. It was in connection with these that we discussed the question of "repeats" at the beginning of this chapter; and though I have advised students to begin by concentrating their invention on the centre of the design they intend to be repeated, in order to avoid the danger of losing all intensity in their pattern, I must add that good effects are often obtained by reversing the half of a design instead of repeating it. The second example of a weaving pattern in Plate XXXI. is an instance of this method. It is, of course, a principle of economy, and the symmetry it entails would be out of place if the design were to stand entirely by itself; but where it is meant to be indefinitely repeated the plan is excusable, because when the two halves are placed back to back you are charmed by an apparently different design from that in which they are placed face to face. Another example of a reversed design is one we have all been familiar with when, as children, we wrote our names in ink and doubled the piece of paper inwards, before it was dry, to see what sort of goblin our autograph would change into.

The sheepfold in Plate XXXIV. is an instance of a simple repeating design based on a more or less hexagonal scheme. repetition throughout is obvious, but every detail belongs to the central idea, and is not introduced merely to facilitate the task of The vineyard in the same plate is an example of a free diaper—that is to say, a diaper based on the repetition of a geometrical figure, but varying in the details of every repeat. Such a design as this can, of course, only be drawn by hand from beginning to end, and is a type of this form of ornament which is independent of mechanical assistance in its production. Though it is usual to think of a diaper as an "all over" pattern, in which the design is repeated not only from side to side, but up and down as well, many beautiful instances occur which are composed of bands of rich ornament, with wider or narrower intervals. These bands may consist of the same or different patterns, and those patterns may be composed of spirals or friezes, or a repeating design. They are, of course, easier than the

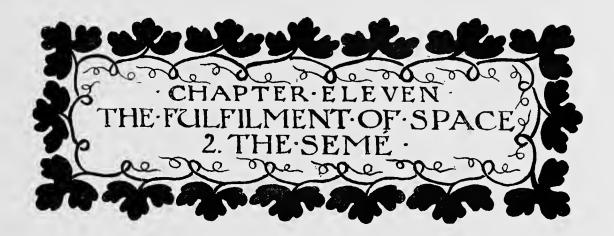


ELABORATE DIAPERS.

more ambitious ones we have just been looking at, and can hardly be called diapers so much as methods of covering a surface with linear decorations.

I hardly expect that many amateurs will attempt the more complex forms of the diaper. To do them justice requires the time and experience which is almost entirely devoted to the practice of Art. As in the final forms of the frieze, the diaper, beyond the point we have carried it to, passes beyond the scope of this essay. Its geometrical basis will, however, always give it an atmosphere of passivity, as if the constructive boundaries kept their occupants prisoners. The removal of those lines, and the fresh conventions opened up in this way, will constitute the tradition of the semé which we shall treat of in the next chapter. But if the function of a semé is to express freedom, growth, and motion, the diaper will still have its proper mysteries and special triumphs. The charm of quiet things is seen there to greater advantage, just as enforced service evokes unforeseen virtues. It is consequently a preferable form of decoration in places where we prefer a restful state of mind to an ecstatic and impulsive one. It is as inartistic to possess too many examples of one style of Art, as it is unfortunate to possess none of any. No church has more than one High Altar, and the supreme connoisseur values his treasures for the relation they bear to each other, and the unity they all combine to create.



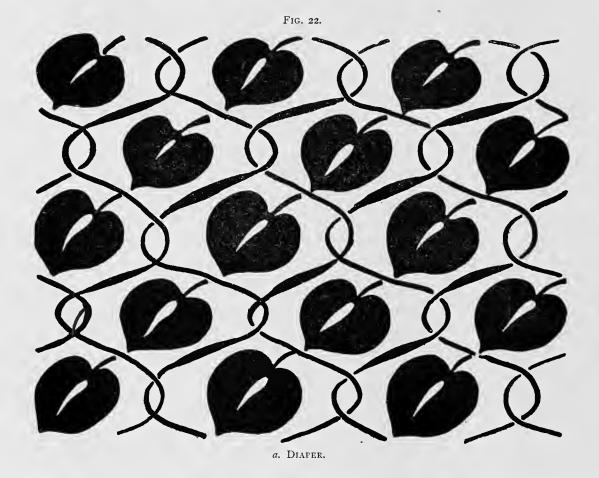


E saw in the last chapter how one kind of diaper changes into another. The first is nothing else than a cage, made by the meeting, crossing, or interlacing of lines or ribbons; the second kind shuts up pretty objects between the bars of the cage; the third tears the bars away, but the prisoners are still too dizzy to move; and, lastly, in the semé our captivity is quite forgotten, and we may sing and dance in freedom and safety—

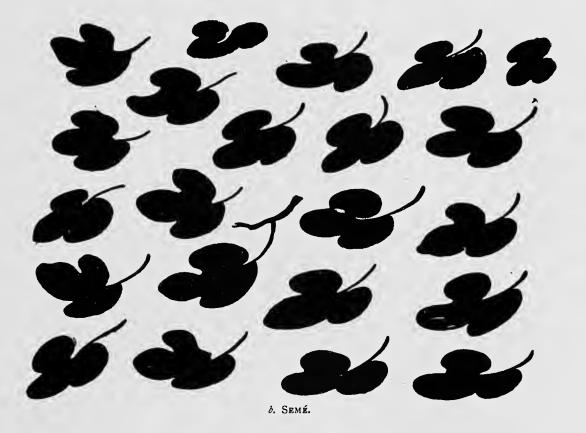
"He who bends to himself a joy,
Does the wingéd life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise."

A semé might occasionally result from the confusion of a diaper, but as a rule the sentiment involved in each leads to the employment of different kinds of ornaments. Fig. 22 illustrates a diaper and its apparently resultant semé, but you will observe that something more than a haphazard upheaval of the leaves has effected the change. Their very character has altered. If a disturbance was the cause, the feeling of disturbance remains, and the leaves have learnt to dance, if only a dance of death. There is a beautiful instance of a semé of leaves in mosaic, on the walls of one of the staircases in the British Museum. It conveys an indescribable charm, because the artist has made a mood for us, and has created an atmosphere of falling leaves. He has reproduced not so much the incident as

the sentiment; not so much the facts as the forces behind the facts. That is the characteristic of the semé and the secret of its peculiar fascination. It seizes hold of the life as it passes; it is a picture of forces rather than facts, of suggestions, passions, motives, fact-creative and fact-impelling. The tendency of a diaper is materialistic. It is obliged to lay stress on the body because its actions are restricted within rigid limits. The semé shows its soul. It is a reformed diaper; it chafes at restraint and is careless of accuracy. So long as we can guess what the things are meant to be, it is not at first particular as to how they are drawn; what it wants to tell us is how they move and what they mean.



The range of diapers increases of course with the extent of our sympathies, from simple abstract or heraldic symbols to the promise



of a wider naturalism. But the more passionate method of a semé revolutionises the fundamental construction itself by twisting a rigid convention into a living motive. It is this that makes the principles of a semé appeal to us so strongly while we are trying to nurse some renaissance of spontaneous Art through the present dark ages of insensitive mechanism, when our touch with vital traditions is perilously feeble, and theories about Art usurp its instinctive development.

If you can only draw a single leaf you can still draw it with feeling, and learn what a semé means. You may even make a charming design out of it; and please us with some insight into Nature where before we had eyes that saw not. It is in such a sense as this that Art interprets Nature, but it is by telling the story in your own way, by introducing your feelings into Nature's accidents, and not by trying to make her tell the story for you. So long as the diaper remains geometrical it can give no imaginative explanation of phenomena with irregular characteristics. But the

value of a semé is that it seizes at once on this very irregularity and makes a feature of it.

The old conventions of decorative Art, which we are obliged to honour and obey, were drawn from a wide but necessarily more limited experience than our own. They consisted mainly of two ideas or principles—the idea of continuity and the idea of separateness; of being held together and of being kept apart. The spiral and the diaper, which respectively illustrate these principles, are the instinctive expressions of our own wavering lives and chequered fortunes, and echo the gestures which we share in common with all creation. As the Christian spiral is the energised form of the Pagan or mathematical one, so the semé is the inspired re-incarnation of the conventionally heraldic diaper. The ideas of continuity or separateness still remain the underlying principles of our Art, but we must make them mean more now than they used to, and fulfil nearer and more domestic service than we are apt to suppose they were intended for. Unfortunately the cheap machine-facture of useful things, and the corresponding waste of intelligence spent in the manu-facture of mere ornaments, has produced a slovenly confusion in our mind as to the real purposes of Art. While we patronise a form of art that only aims at imitating Nature, we neglect what is of primary importance to our actual civilisation. We buy pictures and discuss their "tone," and "breadth," and "quality," but forget to ask for simplicity of design in the shape of things like our cups and saucers, for example, which we are always handling and looking at, or to be particularly anxious about how they are ornamented. If we are really anxious to be patrons of Art let us remember that there are very few pictures which are worth buying, and those few generally out of the reach of our pockets, while we can further the real progress of Art with far less expense to ourselves, and infinitely greater benefit to the community, by insisting that what we use and wear should be strong and simple, and what we admire easy and innocent. But I fear we have got grand ideas into our heads. We "go to Nature for our Art" as we go to the seaside for a change of air, and take it in doses as we do our medicine. In the

days of the greatest art the pulse of one tradition beat through the veins of all production, and no distinction in character was drawn between the humblest utensils and the most ambitious work of art. The skilfullest draughtsman intrusted his serenest thought to perishable clay, and perfect powers could be purchased for pence; but who of the artists you patronise to-day could decorate your teacup for you, or even not consider himself insulted by the request?

That little or no public recognition attends the mere designer of manufactured ware, only proves into what an apathy of wooden tradition our decoration has fallen, and how little we really care about it. The question is, nevertheless, one of the gravest, for if there is to be any resurrection of Art from its deadly respectability and uselessness, it must get itself connected once more with honest and necessary labour, and supplement its endeavour to be original with that obedience to tradition which the making of useful things requires; or if, from the other point of view, the people who are responsible for our modern decoration wish to regain our respect, they must rescue their art from the contempt the introduction of machinery has thrown it into, and prove themselves our benefactors by making what we shall be proud to possess, and by displaying a kindlier feeling in their art, and a deeper touch with nature. On this account there is every reason to hope that the rise of our landscape art is indicative, in its appreciation of rural things, of some desire to return to simpler methods of living, which must always be associated with the country, and so produce an effect on the traditions of decorative art. People are beginning to discover that pictures of cows and cottages do not satisfy all our sentiments about country life. Is it possible to suspect that what artists have done with so much affection and care is, after all, not the finished art they have imagined it, but the immature and archaic source from which farreaching issues may spring, and traditions rise that may revolutionise the future of all our art? It is curious to remember how it was the fashion, quite recently, to demand great literalness in works of art, and severe adherence to local truth; but happily this invasion of antiquarian conscientiousness has died a natural death, and left us

free to adopt saner methods. Is it too much to expect, that out of a pre-Raphaelite love of detail devoted to an imaginative ideal on the one hand, and an impressionistic preference for broad effects in painting things that we all can see on the other hand, a combination might ensue which would be based on an imaginative view of nature, and devoted to a practical end? Art is not an ephemeral veneer on the life of the upper classes, but ought to be the natural possession of everybody. So long as we shut it out of the workshop we are still barbarians-nay, worse than barbarians-and our schools of art only tempt the clever ones among the workers to leave the labour they might redeem, to follow ambitious, false, and unavailing efforts. Great artists are born, and not made; what is more, they are born very seldom, two or three, perhaps, in a century, and no amount of schools of art will help to teach them their business, for they have been sent into the world to teach us. A man like John Pearson, the coppersmith, who with exceptional powers and a real insight into the scope and natural symbolism of design, has clung to his class and his handicraft, has chosen not only the happiest portion, but the one that will bring him the more enduring fame.

The old forms of diaper and spiral will always remain; we cannot evolve new principles of design, till we create new worlds to evolve them from. Our mission is to pour fresh life into the arts of design, and evoke a more general interest in the practice of them. Why should we always think of ourselves as dragging dispiritedly through the end of an era, instead of joyfully inaugurating a new one, when our wider experience and ambition make it our duty to open men's eyes to the imaginative wealth that they can make their own, and a world where everything that lives is a symbol of life, and may again become sacred for us? Daisies will make as beautiful a semé as fleur-de-lys. A shield is still a shield if a lamb is its charge instead of a leopard. Out in the highways and hedges lies the designer's school of art. He must love the larger Nature though he cannot tell a blackbird from a thrush, or an alder from a willow. The sun must chequer his poem with gold, or cross it with bars of grey and silver. On such a stage the facts of Nature, her vocal and dumb

animals, shall play their parts. What a stage, and everything on it bursting with infinite suggestions, if we could only take note of them fast enough! Indeed, the very stones cry out loud, and in the spring the whole world aspires in pointed praise of budding leaf, and ritual of passionate appeal. Yes! However much we admire a thing, tree, flower, mountain, meadow, or cloud, it is not from copying individual instances of them that we shall create a work of art. Let us study them by all means, we cannot do so enough, but it is the aggregate sentiment of their kind that Art must finally reach and give us.

"Love, free love cannot be bound To any tree that grows on ground."

That is Blake's message to us, and he, par excellence, is our prophet, not a mad, but a very sane one. The type and not the instance is the artist's love. Not the cold-blooded abstraction we generally mean by a type, which ends by robbing a thing of its personality and all those pet failings which make it interesting and lovable. Not that, but the ageless ghost we see the shadow of and are bound to follow, if it is only the will-o'-the-wisp of our own reflections dancing in Nature's inconstant glass.

Machinery, when it takes the place of Art, is tradition's deathwarrant. Who can sing in chains? But the cant "truth" of modern Art is a mental mechanism of equally obstructive character. While the art student is learning to copy accurately what is put in front of him, he is drawing the bolts on his imagination. To give an example of what I mean, there are few things that prick us to the joyful quick more than the discovery of a colony of daffodils in the corner of some field. Such a *meinie* of pensive heads and questioning eyes! We enjoy a scene of this sort in an ecstasy, a mood which no artist, conscientiously copying what he sees, can reproduce for us. He can certainly put a great deal into his picture which you never saw there, and never wanted to see; but will conscientiously leave out what you did feel, and wanted to catch and keep.

And painting as he has learned to paint, how can the modern realistic artist help himself! Six hundred years ago the profession

went mildly mad over the discovery of perspective. Art then entered on its first scientific stage, and the first check was given to spontaneity. Then came Anatomy, the Classics, and Chiaroscuro. Great artists became courtiers, and kings connoisseurs of their own portraits. Lastly, here in England we discovered atmosphere, and the limits of objective realism were reached. Art transcends all conditions, and Turner paints his Polyphemus in spite of them. Perhaps such conditions were necessary to prove what a genius Turner was; but what I wish to point out is, that at each fresh scientific imposition, anatomy, light and shade, perspective and atmosphere, more people are prevented from becoming artists, because they have to overcome such a number of intellectual accomplishments before they can put their real feelings into oil-paint, and our chance of getting Turners to transcend these conditions becomes rarer and rarer.

These conditions are really the credentials of modern Art. And though nothing can ever be done by wishing one could do it, many people must lose sight of their original object altogether when it is hidden under such a number of tests. And after all the examinations are passed, what has our learning taught us? No picture can adequately echo our feelings when we see a lawn sprinkled with crocus, or a copse full of wild wind-flowers. These are visions of fairyland, and must be painted in a fairylike and unreal way, by a field vert semé with flowers, argent, or, and purpure. Which is the more truthful method we must decide for ourselves. To me, that is the truer Art which gives me the impression I love best.

And what, after all, is this Art which we think so real, and which has fascinated us, not only to the exclusion of handicraft, but seemingly to all power of imaginative design? What are most pictures but portraits of particular things taken at a particular time from a particular point of view? Can that be called the expression of the imagination, which at best is a gross libel on fact? Facts are not fancies but their gaolers. No one can compose a poem from a page of statistics; and a work of real imagination is "like Nature" for other reasons. It goes to the heart at once, because it is the heart it appeals to; and is the essence of a thousand thoughts and

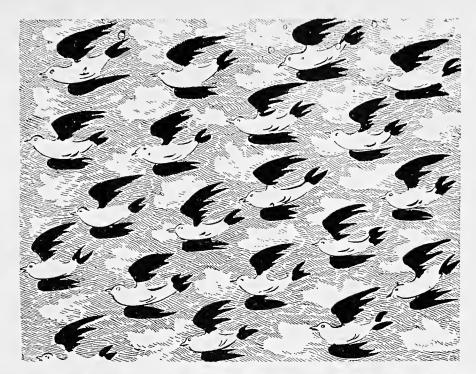
memories caught at all times, and from many points of view. And I say this, not from want of appreciation of many exquisite poems that have been painted during the Picture-age of Art, but from intense sympathy with them, and the conviction that their authors were as truly called to that work as were any prophets. But the number of modern pictures that are classical, or that will be valued two hundred years hence, will, I believe, be a very small one; and it is more than probable that the best art on realistic lines has already been done, and cannot be surpassed. The sun has set that rose in Turner's Polyphemus, and Millet's "Angelus" has tolled the knell of a day of toil. The tradition of pictures is moribund. We know, to-day, that they do not and cannot give us the help we ask from Art. Another sun has risen, and a new day dawned.

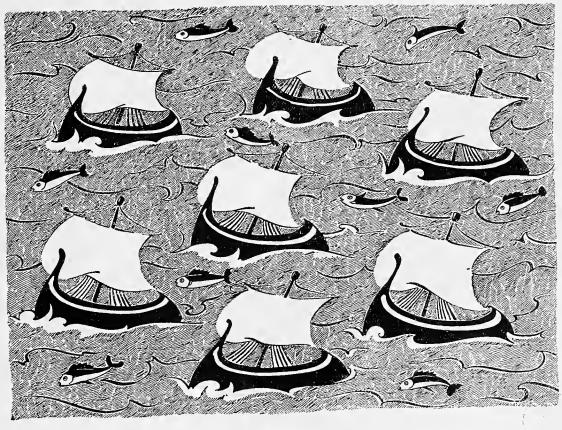
The body of the new Art is handicraft; its soul, our sympathy with all living things, and a keen belief in their significance to us. The point of view from which it will set to work will be a symbolical one, and every aspect of nature will be presented in a nobly conventional manner. Thus, a diaper or a semé, being made up of a number of objects, will give us the charm of a crowd of things, especially of things associated with our industry or recreation. That vineyard in Plate XXXIV., for instance, is a quite unreal picture of a vineyard; but you have in that conventional treatment of it the most satisfactory symbol of a subject that no realistic rendering could accomplish. And why? Because in the dexterous arrangement and equal consideration for each row, the deliberate placing of each leaf, and counting of each bunch of grapes, you enter into the feelings of the tillers of the vineyard, sharing their joys and sorrows; because, in short, it is full of human interest. If modern landscape art would give us "truths" of this description, it is welcome to keep its other traditions so long as it finds them useful; and while it remains sincere, its touch with the purifying soil saves it from the affectations, the mediævalisms, and the demi-monde fin-de-siècle corruption that make the town-bred Art loathsome in honest eyes.

For the love of homeliness and humble life, peace, and the companionship of peaceful things, we look mainly for the renaissance

that is coming; and although the system we are elaborating is an artificial one, as all systems must be, it is out of that indefinite passion that loves to wrest poems from stocks and stones that we shall carve the corner-stones of the palace of Art. We cannot always expect an artist to forsake his habits and begin his education again; we can only remind him that the practice of every art is necessarily a compromise with the Nature he has learnt to reverence, and that his work at last will only be valuable if he has looked at her with inward as well as outward eyes.

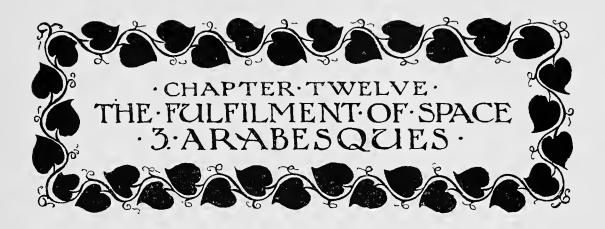
The character of a diaper is retained in a happy sense in this vineyard by the repetition of the stakes and cross poles that support the vines. Had the artist been a German of the Rhineland, and not an Italian, he would have given us vines semé, because there they grow on poles and not on trellises. But whether the vineyard is north or south of the Alps the husbandman would plant his vines in as orderly a manner as possible, and a diaper would consequently be its most appropriate convention in Art. A semé, on the other hand, would best represent those phenomena in Nature whose charm consists in a certain accidental disregard for formal arrangements (Plate XXXV.). A flight of birds would present a strange and quite uncanny appearance if it executed geometrical manœuvres in the sky. We are delighted at an occasional approximation to one, but should be terrified if the rooks got arithmetic into their heads and flew home in rank and file of numbered accuracy. That would be against Nature: against, that is to say, what we have grown accustomed to and think beautiful. If the sky were cut up into squares, and pricked for a star in the middle of each, its wonder and worship would vanish. If the fishing fleet went to sea in monotonous regularity, we should believe the sea had lost the fascination of its charm and fearfulness, and that the sailor's life was as adventureless as a mill-hand's. And consequently we should aim at making our semés rather contradict than obey a formal arrangement, especially when they represent things which Nature arranges informally. When, however, the objects are conventionally heraldic, a formal mathematical disposition of them is often preferable, and such arrangements





XXXV. Informal Semés.

have always been called semés, and I should be unwilling to change the nomenclature or deny their effectiveness. There would be no advantage gained by disturbing the regularity of a semé of hearts, crowns, thistle- or poppy-heads, for example, because these are long established and recognised conventions; and also because you would draw all your hearts very much alike, and all your crowns, and all your poppy-heads. But even in these more formal semés I think I may venture to say that you will get the best effects by guessing the distances instead of measuring them. In the drawing of the objects themselves, too, whether they are dynamic or static, you should not try to make them too much like each other. should not think of your semé as a ground stuck over with impressions of one thing, an angel or a song-bird, for instance, but rather imagine that a choir of angels or thrushes had come to sing to you; nor are any two hearts susceptible of exactly the same emotions, nor two flowers ever turned out by Nature of exactly the same pattern. The informal semés we must put in a higher category than the formal ones. Their disorderly order marks a higher pitch of artistic achievement, just because it is nobler, as it is more difficult, to be our own masters and at the same time faithful servants of society. The informality of a beautiful semé is, in fact, only a more delicate statement of a harmonious balance. We must recognise our passions and restrain them: be joyful, and not lose our heads; angry, and sin not; so that the ultimate beauty of this, as of every other form of Art, depends on our power of expressing the best feelings we have.



THE third method of decorating a space of indefinite extent is by an arabesque.

This term covers a multitude of virtues, as well as the vices for which it has become the excuse, and which in their extreme licence afford a curious commentary on what is supposed to be the original meaning of the word. According to the accepted tradition, Arabesque at first implied Arabian or Mohammedan ornament conceived or controlled by a dogmatism so severely monotheistic that it forbade the representation of visible living forms, lest the delight we might take in them should detract from the consequence of an invisible deity. It was an impoverished form of idolatry which could conceive the Creator jealous of His creatures. It would be wiser to read the injunction against making graven images or likenesses of living things, as directed against that excessive materialism which would sacrifice the spirit to the body, and forgets the purpose of life and Art in anxiety about ways and means. We cannot refrain from creating, for our instinct is to create; and we are happy, to-day, in the belief that our instincts are right if they are rightly led. To try and suffocate an instinct is only to warp it, and is sure to lead in time to corresponding and greater abuses. And so this Arabian conventional Art was destined before long to introduce vegetable forms as the ones least objectionably idolatrous. Here, indeed, with the superficial art-instincts of Eastern temperaments, the style stayed and flourished;

but its adoption by so-called Christian nations was a fatal step in. its career, and opened the door to all the nightmares of inverted imaginations. The original fallacy, by insulting the art-instinct seems to have poisoned the source of the style, and to twist its progress all askew, and arabesque remains with us, for the most part, a ghoulish ornament in spite of its liberty. Because its principles forbade it to be honestly true to nature, it became dishonestly false to sentiment; and in spite of its popularity and the opportunity it gives to ingenious fingers, there is little in it which is capable of betraying deep feelings, or convictions of any intensity. Indeed, its popularity is mainly due to its evident preference for superficial cleverness of technique to intentional design-a sufficient reason for its remaining fashionable with flippant civilisations. And if we are told that we ought to look for serious qualities in serious works of art, such as pictures, and not expect to find them in the merely ornamental accessories whose business it is to be the Cinderellas to these masterpieces, we can only regret that distinctions exist which pretend to appeal to our higher feelings in one form, and pander to our frivolities in another. Such a distinction was perhaps inevitable, but its continued acceptance means that we cannot distinguish between the honest inventive spirit of fun, and the crude insincerity of a practical joke. True Art cannot draw a line between the sacred and the profane. What decorates the alehouse cannot dishonour the church, for Art must be as much a matter of unity as life is.

To refuse a natural development is to accept an unnatural one; and decoration based on the refusal of natural forms becomes a home for unnatural ones, for insincerities and shams, a resort for strong but purposeless imaginations. It is always necessary to choose between noble and ignoble imaginations, between true grotesque and senseless parody. The former involves the creation of new types, the latter is only the mutilation of old ones. Beyond the questionable advantage of a mere display of technical facility, a review of historical and contemporary specimens of arabesque ornamentation leaves little impression on the mind but one of heartless degeneracy. Its popularity culminates naturally enough in the later Renaissance. It is essentially

the decoration of decadence. It is characterised throughout by a mocking insincerity; its pretensions are all hollow. Masks take the place of faces, and stare insolently through blank gaps of eyes. Everything is mutilated or mended. Nothing is finished as it ought to be, but tails off into strings of slovenly festoon and hanks of acanthus. Every clever designer knows how fascinating the mastery over late and flamboyant forms of acanthus becomes, and what a peculiarly sensuous pleasure accompanies the exercise of his power; but unless he can restrain the temptation to use these forms indiscriminately, the facility with which they appear to settle every difficulty of composition is apt to engender a sort of madness in the artist, and blind him to the beauty of all else.

The incongruous collection of things combined in Renaissance ornament, masks and helmets, torches and cuirasses, dolphins and dragons, cranes and apes and satyrs, are nevertheless still festooned and in some slack fashion fastened together with ribbons and wreaths and ingenious twists and twirls of mock vegetation, in which we may still recognise our spiral if only in its dying gasps. This faint trace of conventional adherence is its sole claim to the title of traditional ornament. For the rest, the higgledy-piggledy introduction of furniture into design is a symptom of decay in imaginative power. No art should trespass on the province of a sister art. To carve a chest, to forge a steel blade and inlay it with gold thread, to enrich the reliquary with scarlet and blue enamel, are the functions of distinct handicrafts; but to make pictures of the chest, the rapier, and the shrine, is to confess your deficiency in original ideas; and though I have given an instance of the insertion of vases in the intervals of the spiral, and recognise that other things besides natural ones have occasionally a similar claim, it is because they are hallowed by constant human use, and because their representation is consequently careful and symbolical. To design for each handicraft is legitimate and necessary, but the craftsman is properly his own designer, because he must understand best what sort of design is most suitable to his particular craft. If the art of design is a distinct one, it ought to know enough of handicrafts to be able to adapt

itself to the peculiar demands of each. At the same time it is impossible to draw a hard-and-fast line between what is true and what is false in Art. The final test of all work is the spirit in which it is done. If that is true, all is true. In the best times and the best styles many atrocities are committed; in the worst, some incomprehensible exception gleams like a beryl in a setting of lead. The great German illustrator, Ludwig Richter, is one of these exceptions. He is tied to no tradition but that of love. He is greatest when he is humblest, among puppies, birds, and babies; in the cottage, the shop, and the alehouse; least when he tries to excel in the classical, the religious, and the sublime. The delicate arabesques of vine sprays with their tossing tendrils which weave his illustrations into the letterpress, mark him as our last great missal painter, illuminating the book of life with unerring instinct. His arabesque Rhineland ornament hangs lightly on to the skirts of tradition by virtue of its affectionate patriotism and confessedly decorative duty. It is an innocent and light-hearted comment on an innocent and light-hearted existence, when the apprentice shouldered his knapsack and started with song and sunshine for his Wanderjahr; or quaffed the landlord's wine and wooed his daughter; times when German students vied in the length of their pipes and the preposterousness of their adventures; or launched a gay boat on the shining river, to float, a merry crew, past castle, village, and vineyard, while the laughter rose and the goblets clashed, and the song echoed from bank to bank:-

> "Am Rhein, am Rhein da wachsen unser Reben; Gesegnet sei des Rhein!"

I hope I have shown—perhaps in my jealousy for its nobler purposes I have too severely condemned—the degeneracies of arabesque. I do not wish to curtail liberty, but only licence; not to restrain fun, but only buffoonery. The true use of the style is based on giving lines as much life as possible; and as when you want to make a semé out of a diaper the first thing you have to do is to leave out the lines and free the figures between them, so if you

want an arabesque you must first of all ignore the figures and free the lines. So that an arabesque may properly be defined as an arrangement of spiral lines to fill a space in a pleasant fashion, and we shall find it better and easier to make our first arabesques in this way by placing spirals together side by side, or in some other combination, than by trying to galvanise the dead lines of a diaper into ruddier life; for though such an alternative may often in ingenious hands be successful, it is surely better for every distinct traditional stage to have, as far as possible, its own special method.

The use of all artistic terms is necessarily somewhat arbitrary, because it is impossible to prevent one style from sliding into another or borrowing some of its characteristics, and the word arabesque is often made to refer to the decoration of a border or frieze more than a space; but though we cannot always decide whether the decoration we are looking at is best considered lineal or superficial, I think it will be safer to keep the term arabesque for one distinct method of decorating a broad space as opposed to a narrow one. With this provision the treatment of arabesque ornament should involve and remind us of its essentially imaginative and symbolical basis; and since it is so indelibly associated with the universal elements of Art, and originally with the use of abstract more than of organic forms, we ought to emphasise those qualities and make them productive of pleasant instead of repulsive feelings, and let them teach us not how to manufacture meaningless monsters and tie their tails together, but how to cut spaces up into delicate divisions and cover those divisions with misty charm of interlacing lines. Perhaps its most distinctive feature is seen in the Spanish and Persian potter's affection for thin and sensitively sinuous lines, which contrast strangely enough with the obstinately thick ones of our own more Gothic tradition. That this is significant of racial difference no one can deny, nor is it likely that any nation should excel in expressing the feelings of another, though each should learn something of the other's charm. All modes of civilised thought must in their origin be similar, and surely the happiest temperament assimilates the greatest differences best: the more Southern and

Eastern artist can draw lines thickly and carelessly enough where he considers them necessary to his effect; but in his actual patterning, which is his betraying speech, his formal and circumlocutionary manners find their more natural expression in slender and winding lines. The straightest road is not always the quickest way, and arabesque, dissimilar as it may be to much of our Northern sentiment, has achieved in its own line unique triumphs.

Practical education, in Art as in other things, aims less at analysis than adaptation; so that, in spite of their fascination, we shall be careless of exactly copying examples of arabesques taken from purely Spanish or Mohammedan sources. It is our business as far as possible to sympathise with the originals, and then to show how they may be adapted for our own use. First of all, then, arabesque is distinctly the scribes' art. It has the same influence on us, as Phœnician and Egyptian Art had on Greece. It taught us how to write. It is always radical and symbolical, an extension of our alphabet to express those phases of our feelings which are beyond the scope of our speech. Some of the most precious Persian tiles are only raised inscriptions in blue on a background of mazy gold. Persian letters are certainly decorative objects in themselves, but here (fig. 23) are some inscriptions from Spanish dishes which we can all read with pleasure, though the letters spell no sense. Even if they did, it would make no difference to our entertainment, but the fact is, they are not letters at all, but only admirable imitations of them.

Faithful to its literary origin, the tide of Arabian influence has had comparatively small effect of a direct kind on Western handicrafts. Doubtless Moorish Toledo led the fashion for engraving steel blades, before swords were turned, not into ploughshares but Maxim guns. The patterns on Persian carpets and printed cotton have influenced our own textiles. Italy, too, that middle-man of the Middle Ages, that commercial Corinth between East and West, published her secrets to the world after she had pilfered them from every workshop. It is in the decoration of books, however, that Eastern influence has made its more permanent mark on the arts of Europe, and "arabesque"

is constantly used to describe the slender ornament round the pages of mediæval literature. The art of illumination should be a distinctly clerical gift; and the spirit of mediæval Christianity, its love of detail, its profuseness and exuberance, are amply illustrated in what remains to us of its scriptures. The purely decorative portions of the ornamental pages of these beautiful books, contain perhaps the best specimens of traditional arabesque we possess, and mark, in spite of its Christian dress, the outside Christian nature of its origin in



FIG. 23.—PATTERNS DERIVED FROM LETTERS.

the wiriness and sinuosity of its artificial foliage. The illumination in missals is also consistently pure in the character of its grotesque, in contrast to the debased irreligion of later Renaissance ornament. On the other hand, its conservatism to a few traditional types is rather severe, and we could wish that where infinite labour and tenderness abound, greater variety might have been introduced. Such a wish is perhaps greedy in the face of such luxury of beauty. Here (fig. 24), however, are one or two little quotations which are sufficiently typical of the Christian arabesque obtained from these sources, to show its love of sinuous lines and spring-like tendrils

contrasted with angular types of ivy-leaves and concentrated squareness of capital letters glowing with gold leaf and brilliant and solid colour. The development of these capitals into pictorial illustrations probably absorbed the artist's interest, and led him to neglect further invention in the accessories, which in consequence he would be glad to reduce to a few recognised conventional types, easily reproduced as often and wherever it was necessary. At the same time it would

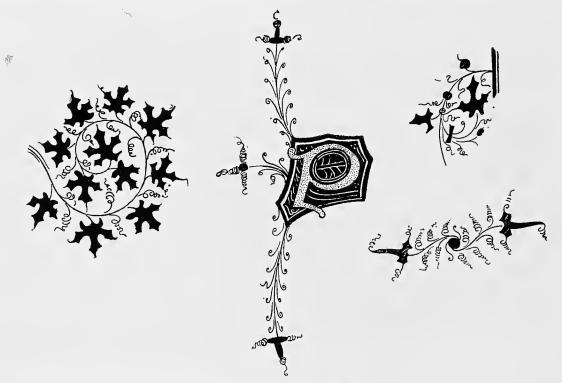


Fig. 24.—Christian Arabesques.

be wrong to complain of this practice, if it shows, as it probably does, what great results can be obtained from a few ideas thoroughly understood, in thoroughly trained, if somewhat unimaginative, hands. One of the greatest causes for fear that the success of the modern movement of handicraft may not last, is exactly the want of received types of this kind. The workers have no clue, no hold on a few patterns which they can reproduce or vary at pleasure. Their education has been one-sided, and if they were left to their own resources, their lack of tradition would leave them at the mercy of those unmeaning

patterns which, instead of helping people to understand the principles of true design, make it more and more difficult for them to believe that there are any principles at all. A lad I was once trying to teach wood-carving to, and whose vigour, while I was present, gave me great encouragement, began to copy in my absence a niggled wreath of grasses and garden stuff which he had copied with great effort from the tailpiece of an article in a weekly trade journal, and than which he could have found nothing more unsuitable. The want of judgment was pitiable, but shows that many pitfalls are close at hand, and baited, too, to catch the unsuspecting amateur.

There has been a great fashion, recently, to revive a mediæval type of book decoration. The intention is praiseworthy, if the







FIG. 25 .- Types of Spanish Patterning.

author is as treasured for what he says as the book is for what it costs. We must not forget, however, that books were once precious because they were rare, and that Blake and Ludwig Richter have carried tradition irretrievably out of the hands of the ecclesiastical mediævalist and made it, for better or worse, profane. The decoration of books, as of everything else, will in the future be based on wider experiences than penetrated the monastery; and it is only with a similar appreciation of their antiquated value, and a consciousness of their modern uselessness except as illustrative of principles, that I include here a few instances of arabesque ornament (fig. 25) taken from Spanish sources, and consequently nearer to the historical origin of the style than our mediævalised ones. In these, as in the first examples of diapers, it is often difficult to say to

which of the three styles of filling a space the pattern properly belongs; but we must remember that if the Arabian imagination has given us a name for one link in our traditional chain, we must not, therefore, expect to find nothing but instances of that class of ornament in Arabian Art and its derivatives. On the contrary, let us hope to discover in the Art of every race which has made its fancy distinctly felt, examples of every stage in the history of Art. Some nations excel in one kind of decoration and some in another, and each stamps its entire production with the features which are most characteristic of its genius. In this way we shall find in Spanish Art, spirals, friezes, semés, and isolated figures and compositions, all remarkable as evincing in greater or less degree the character of an arabesque. This character consists, as we have said, in a strong perception of the possibilities of line work, and the more abstract qualities in ornament. Their animals are knock-kneed and heraldic, and their flowers and foliage unreal in a high degree; but they instinctively love to see a surface conventionally broken up, and its divisions filled with conventional frettings in which there is no evidence at all of a desire to copy nature, though one can discover perhaps some origin for them in the omnipresent vine, and the sacred jots and tittles of the pages of the Koran. spirals, too, are also very beautiful from a different point of view than we are accustomed to; but their instinct seldom allows them to continue even a winding line for long in one direction. They prefer two dimensions, invariably, to one; and when they use the spiral at all, they do so more as a means of covering a space with a number of horizontal or vertical bands. The Greek had very often the same feeling in the decoration of his archaic vases; and like the Greek artist our Spanish potter shows a marked inclination to break his surfaces up into friezes or bands of disconnected ornaments,a method of decoration we drew attention to in the last chapter, and of which fig. 23 may serve as an example.

The subject of Mohammedan tradition is by no means exhausted in such a cursory review. We may have occasion at another time to give some analysis of the extensive use of the pine ornament and all those orders of "the double and the single pinks" which spring from it, and flourish so serenely on Persian and Rhodian ware. These also have their secrets and their special joys, and also, no doubt, their special application. The Spanish craftsman, however, seldom attains much naturalistic skill; his value lies mainly, as we have said, in his mastery over abstract arrangements: he can only draw lines and make blots; and he often crosshatches, like an early Greek artist, to gain the effect of solidity,—a method which becomes very decorative in his hands. We should not, consequently, expect

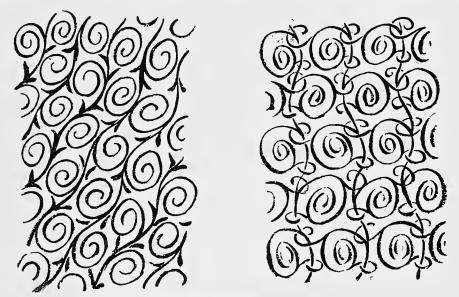


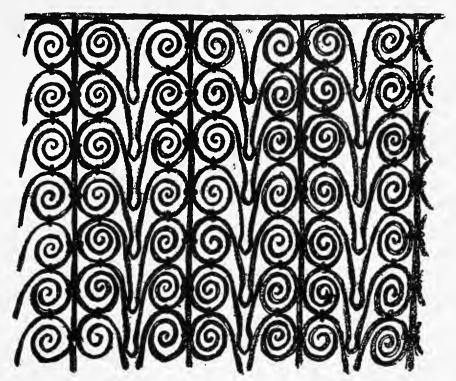
FIG. 26.—FIRST ARABESOUES.

him, any more than the Greek, to be much of a colourist, and so we find his range of pigments very limited; but the colours he uses he blends with absolute taste, and his gold, and bronze, and blue on white grounds, are exquisitely related.

Following, then, our Eastern guide, and adapting his manners to ours—thinking, too, of every style, as we are first bound to think of it, as an expression of the imagination, before it involves any special application to particular handicrafts—we should naturally make our first arabesques look like sinuous diapers, consisting of winding and interlacing spiral lines, without, at present, any contrasting spots or leaves or other objects, but with a very distinct idea of organic

growth. Perhaps the simplest way of all is to draw parallel spirals across the surface we wish to decorate, and to increase their intricacy as we feel the charm of doing so (fig. 26). A later process would be to cover the ground with delicate branching from one stem, taking care to keep the lines of one thickness throughout (Plate XXXVI.).

This scheme is capable of an infinite number of variations; and in fact any arrangement of winding lines which displays the peculiar features of an arabesque is one, and the danger of confusing them with diapers is safely past as soon as we introduce leaves or figures of any description to fill the intervals or break the flow of rampant and slender stems. For in a diaper the lines are geometrically structural. Their only connection with the subsidiary figures is to lock them up in solitary confinement. In an arabesque, on the other hand, the figures spring directly from the stems or have some other intimate and friendly connection with them, or else freak the ground in complete disregard of their control. We must be very careful, too, how we introduce the acanthus into this form of arabesque; our use of it here at any rate must be a very restrained one. It is a difficult weed to eradicate from the garden when once we have given it a firm hold there. Its beautiful and plastic foliage recommends it for the exigencies of an arabesque, and it thrives there like poppies in a cornfield, parching the crop. Its tendency is to confuse the tree with its fruit, the spiral with the filling of its interval. It is the relaxation of the principles of design, and especially that one which bids us keep stalks stalky and the filling of intervals correspondingly round and bossy. All we have learnt in the earlier parts of this book about the construction of spirals will apply equally well when we turn them into arabesques, except in regard to the stems, which we should keep quite thin to begin with. We can consequently now design any number of arabesques by simply repeating, reversing, or crossing a favourite spiral; or by letting one spiral meander in careless elegance over the whole ground we wish to cover. In this field the conventionalised ivy has been an undoubted favourite, as we saw in connection with missal painting, the accentuated points of its leaves contrasting in untiring satisfaction with the rounded curves





XXXVI.

Typical Arabesques.

of the stem. These are naturally the most organic forms that an arabesque can assume, and in drawing them we must be careful to keep the design from becoming centralised and symmetrical. We must not forget that the first condition of all these types of decoration is that their ornament should be evenly dispersed over the whole space they are to occupy. The arabesque fulfils this condition by rambling over the ground in an unmethodical way, turning a corner here and dropping a leaf there, as the lightness of a line or the weight of a leaf is wanted. In this way a uniform width of stem becomes a feature of the design, but if we drew it more symmetrically we should feel bound to thicken it in the more radical parts, and should soon find our wild creeper approximating more and more to the traditional tree form, which constitutes a much later chapter in our tradition, or tempting us to escape the restraint of boundary and become diffuse. And this danger induces me to emphasise, not for the first time, the necessity of keeping the edges of our decorated spaces as severe as possible. We know now that ornament is subordinate to construction. That is a glib statement, whose evident truth may sometimes defeat its very object. So let me add this corollary: That the best construction is the simplest, and that therefore the edges of the spaces we have to decorate, and consequently the edges of our ornament itself, ought to be simple. Good arabesque, however much it winds about inside its boundaries, keeps those boundaries severe. Bad arabesque, on the other hand, is licentious within and unrestrained without. Nature's arabesques have much greater command over themselves. Look at a forest tree, and see the single sweep of outline that gathers all it contains in one huge oval, and says to the aspiring and final twig on every branch, "Thus far, and no farther." If you will prune your arabesques in the same gardener-like way, you will feel how necessary this severity is to bring out the force and contrast of their essentially meandering character.

In curious contrast to the delicacy and unsubstantiality of the majority of arabesque ornament derived from Eastern sources, is our own native ironwork. It would indeed be difficult to imagine the smith, with his proverbial honesty and sturdiness, easily influenced

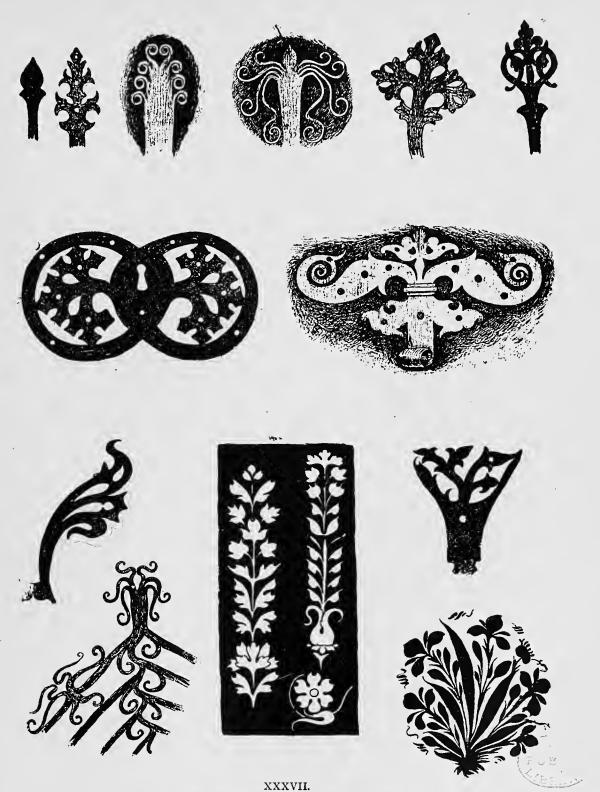
by the airy vanities of the East; and yet the very nature of his material obliges him to obey the same æsthetic conditions. Severest of all handicrafts, absolutely obedient to unflinching laws, we can sympathise with the smith's proud motto, "By hammer and hand all arts do stand," though we may fail, perhaps, to appreciate the entire significance of his conceit, unless he would imply by it that the training a smith must undergo, uniting, as it does, the extremes of physical force and sensitiveness to accuracy of line and relief, fits him to excel in any art, for where nothing can be added without an exact proportion of labour, and labour of the most arduous kind, we may be quite sure that unnecessary detail will be omitted, and severity of execution maintained. Fate is kind in giving us the traditions of wrought ironwork as an antidote and corrective to the tempting dissipation of arabesque, for its initial difficulties and strict application to use make it proudly retentive of the best conditions of manufacture; and I cannot illustrate this chapter of Art better than by drawing your attention to the best possibilities of this noble craft, and the educational importance of its revival.

The figures in Plate XXXVII. are traditional factors in arabesque design taken mainly from the smithy. It has been my endeavour to separate the patterns from the objects they decorate in order to make their adaptation as easy as possible, especially to the amateur craftsman, who may not have the ready pencil of a professional artist. Illustrations often defeat their object by being drawn or photographed from the solid, so that the chance of their being used is made more difficult by the light-and-shade effect in which they appear, and complicated by the interest of their surroundings. In regard to the examples in this plate it must also be borne in mind that they are decorative schemes which are capable of indefinite expansion, and not pictures of completed things. An arabesque is a method of covering an indefinitely-sized space with a particular sort of pattern; and if I had drawn for you instead the whole of the pages and plates, grilles and gridirons from which I have borrowed here, you would probably have seen these objects first, and wished to copy them before you saw and admired the principle of their building up, which

is what I want you to see in order that you may be able to apply them to other purposes as well. And, finally, when we have plodded through the preliminary stages of this tradition of winding lines, and understand the feelings it gives rise to, we can extend it in almost the same degree, and with the same freedom, as a semé. The winding current of our lives is always turning incomprehensibly on itself. We round a corner, or pass a crisis; we touch the acme of our hopes, or find ourselves apparently no nearer wisdom than when we started. Life is a labyrinth of mysterious paths. If we are wise we shall not calculate the cost of each experience, but learn to adapt ourselves obligingly to every new experience as it comes.

I have already hinted at the difficulty of saying to which style an elementary pattern belongs. A greater ambiguity surrounds the more complicated examples. The analysis I have suggested by distinguishing between diapers, semés, and arabesques may prove of some makeshift value, but we must not forget that there are combinations of these styles, especially of semé, with arabesque, and of a large semé with a small one, which are often of great convenience and beauty.

In the simpler and more archaic instances of these blended patterns the Spanish potter with his Moorish tradition is again the best master we can have. He is easy to learn from, because his scope is a limited one, and his talent conservative and only cautiously speculative within the limits of his tradition. In the combinations he is fondest of, the semé takes the more important part; that is to say, it is apparently imposed on the diaper or arabesque, which sinks into the mere but decoratively appropriate fretting of the background. From the abstract standpoint of the Moorish artist's mind, little or no importance attaches to the question of relief which to our Western and more practical understanding is so curiously important. The Moorish artist paints his figures on the top of his background or fills in the spaces between his figures without wishing to suggest that the one is more remote from the spectator than the other. He is consequently more capable of giving the whole of his attention to the more purely æsthetic side of his ornament, and therefore I think



TRADITIONAL FACTORS IN ARABESQUE DESIGN.

he is more worthy of imitation. Beautiful colour and delicate lines are just as independent of the conditions of aërial perspective as is the expression of strong feeling and vigorous action.

The Eastern artist is wilfully untrue to Nature. That is at once the secret of his power and the reason of his limitations. He will draw lines and put splashes of colour just where they are wanted without caring much what they may mean or what they may be mistaken for. This attitude of his represents a very essential quality in the art of designing, but one that we must learn not to depend on too much, for his power stops there, as his influence over us should also. If our greater knowledge and keener, kinder sympathies can change his inarticulate figures into living facts, we shall only prize the lesson of his peculiar skill more and show ourselves his worthier disciples. One of the greatest secrets of imaginative invention in every branch of art is the power of realising a suggestion that is no more than a shadow, and changing an accident into an intention. In this way our mistakes often become our greatest masters. "Improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked roads without improvement are the roads of genius."



T would be impossible to imagine a consistent scheme of decorative art without subordinating natural things not only to conventional shapes, but to artificial situations and arrangements as well. The conventional shape of a thing that has been accepted as its symbol for a long time becomes a type, as the Greek idea of a dolphin became a type of fishes; and the satisfactory arrangement of things in a conventional manner becomes a pattern or a design. To make an accurate copy of a daisy is one thing, to draw it in decorative relation to other daisies or other objects is quite another, and demands less a knowledge of the flower itself than an instinctive and trained sense of the sort of company it ought to keep in the fairyland of imaginative art. You cannot extract principles of design out of daisies by pulling them to pieces and rearranging their bits in symmetrical or unsymmetrical order. The feelings that daisies give us are not expressed in this way any better than by copying a bunch of them on a bank or in a glass of water. The sum of feelings given us not only by daisies but by everything about us is, as I have tried to show, the material out of which the principles of art, its conventions and traditions, grow. By the evolution of tradition, I mean the gradual change these artificial shapes and arrangements undergo by being handed down from generation to generation of artists, during the course of which they are bound to alter, to improve or degenerate, while often their original meaning

is forgotten because it has grown unimportant, or been varied to express some more urgent idea.

A semé of spots will represent the pleasure we take in spotted things generally, a semé of daisies the special enjoyment we have in looking at a field full of flowers; but because we see that the field is full of flowers before we see what sort of flowers they are, because, in other words, the field might have been full of milkmaids or buttercups instead of daisies, we find it useful to make a conventional daisy, which may stand at a pinch for other flowers as well. Thus we shall find conventionalised forms of all sorts, such as a *fleur-de-lys*, which is more or less like a lily, but not too like any lily in particular; a conventionalised tree, which ought not to be mistaken for anything else than a tree, but need not necessarily be more like an ash than a beech or an elm; a conventionalised bird, conventionalised horses, dogs, lions, men, just as they came out of the ark—types of animals and not portraits of them.

Such a conventionalised animal or thing is, or ought to be, ornamental, not because it falls in with any theoretical law of beauty, but because it expresses in the shortest possible way the feelings of delight we have about the class of things it is supposed to stand for. So that picture of a hare from a Greek vase in fig. 15 is not only an artistically scientific type of hares, but is decorative or beautiful as well, because it embodies the sleek attitude and marvellously swift course of a hare's flight. To produce such important types as this, so full of vigour and imaginative power, is naturally the result of ages of endeavour; and designs which consist of only one figure are not so easy as we should be at first inclined to think. Indeed, the easier, as they are also the earlier forms of Art, make pictures of lots of things instead of single ones, and represent complicated states of mind rather than lucid ones, just as the worship of many gods comes before that of a few, or of only one. As a consequence the earliest traditions are those which teach us how to arrange many things together. These are the traditions we have so far been busy in investigating: the spiral, the semé, and the frieze. In all of these a high standard of civilised thought can be

expressed, especially, perhaps, in the frieze, which tends more than the others to give us an organic and consecutive view of matters we are interested in. A scheme such as ours, which attempts to give an impetus to handicrafts by bringing them more into touch with our life and thoughts, does not pretend to be scientific or historical from the ordinary point of view. Deductions from the past, however true, cannot be infallible for the present or the future. What we believe, or can be made to believe now, is far more actual for us than what may really have happened. Christianity is the greatest fact in the world, whether Christ existed or not; and the truest history, after all, is the record of human imaginings. Nor is the history of the traditions of Art merely the story of their gradual rise and sudden fall, for that would be to condemn every period except a hypothetical one, when we suppose a climax was reached. is that from being the case, that I think almost every period will give us examples of aspiring as well as debased Art, and we who have such unequalled opportunities for learning what the world has already achieved, ought surely to make the most of our opportunities, and build at any rate some worthy foundations for the art of the future.

When I speak of the traditions of Art I always do so from an immediate and practical point of view, instead of from the historical and antiquarian one. The history of artistic traditions is written in defiance of dates. The pattern round a sun-dried bowl scratched by the enlightened South-Sea Islander yesterday, or the civilised Greek of twenty-five centuries ago, is very likely more modern in its sentiment, more helpful to the craftsman who wishes to put his feelings into his work, than all the pictures, and the statues, and the drawings, in this year's art galleries and illustrated periodicals. A real Art echoes universal feelings, and ought to be as intelligible to the people who live in an English village to-day as it was five centuries ago to the natives of Florence. The difference is only one of dialect. Here, we have in reality representatives of every nation and time: gentle men and rude men, Teutons and Celts, Greeks and Goths, Jews and Philistines, very thinly disguised in the smocks

and frocks of modern society, and ready, if we only knew how to teach them, to create a great Art again.

The frieze was limited as we have seen to interjectional episodes, or ideas which are suited to a characteristically processional shape. Beyond such it can hardly be made to extend, and we are obliged to return to the main current of tradition to discover what other conventions are useful for telling us the thoughts and feelings of humanity. These artistic conventions will generally be found to centre round the square or circle, or at any rate tend to produce more concentrated shapes than those we have been so far accustomed to. For clearly, putting aside exceptional predilections for irregularities which fancy or the needs of structure may suggest, we shall prefer the sort of shapes which we can look at with the least amount of inconvenience as a final form of Art.

When we first discovered that there were spaces to fill as well as lines to draw, our instinct naturally led us to cover them with spirals and friezes, the patterns we were most used to. The diaper and the semé were the result. But just as the spiral and the frieze were in their origin supposed to be indefinitely long lines of ornament, so in our last three chapters we were obliged to treat of spaces of equally indefinite size, illustrating many stories without an end. But the more dramatic the tale, the more definite the idea or dogma, the more reason there is to tell it as pithily and concisely as possible; and so we shall have to trace the evolution of the single design, the telling of the simple tale, out of the more involved traditions that precede it. It will immediately occur to most of us, and with some reason, that we can easily put an end to the indefinite nature of a diaper or a semé by drawing a line round it wherever we like. So we can, but in doing so we must remember that we are destroying the essential character of a semé and its main charm, which is the suggestion of an indefinite extension of its ornament, just as the sky gives one an idea of infinity peopled with stars. This suggestion of infinity is not materially injured when the semé ends abruptly with the edge of the thing it is decorating, but would be as soon as you enclosed it with an arbitrary border. You can





XXXVIII. Enclosed Semés.

easily understand the paradox, that by adding to a thing you can make it smaller. Infinity defined is infinity no longer. An unfinished pattern suggests indefinite extension, for the same reason that the most satisfactory way of finishing a spiral, when it means more than it has space to say, is to cut it straight off and leave the continuation of it to the imagination. But a semé with a border round it would have to stand as a symbol for the pleasure we take in a limited number of things instead of an unlimited number of them; as, for instance, in the planets in distinction to a whole heaven of stars, or in a plate of apples in distinction to an apple-tree full of them. The fewer the objects are, the more importance, of course, is attached to each one of them, till their diminishing number will not allow us to call the pattern a semé any more. By some such careful elimination, with increased emphasis on the remainder, we may of course at last reach a design composed of only one individual surrounded by a subordinate frame, and this would be a useful and quite legitimate way of arriving at the goal we are aiming at; but the one we must adopt will be a little more circuitous, and will take in some outlying traditions we might otherwise miss.

To begin with, however, here (Plate XXXVIII.) are two instances of semés which have had their infinity curtailed, and have quite made up their minds to the change. In the former the semé is unimportant from a purely decorative point of view, and is therefore surrounded by a correspondingly important frame. We ought to remember in respect to it that every printed page of a book is a semé of letters surrounded as a rule by a white margin or frame, and that therefore the first condition of beautiful printing lies in the choice of beautiful type and relation of black to white. In the second example the pictorial interest is reversed, the central portion is the important one, and the frame is proportionally simple and unassuming. This relation between the two parts of the design must be noticed. To surround a rich design with an elaborate border is seldom effective, and generally vulgar; but when a simple semé is set in a plain frame, the insignificance of the design is often balanced by richness of material. A mere semé of spots may really consist of jewels

lying in a bed of gold, so that where precious materials are used their actual or associative value will often take the place of elaboration of design or finish of workmanship.

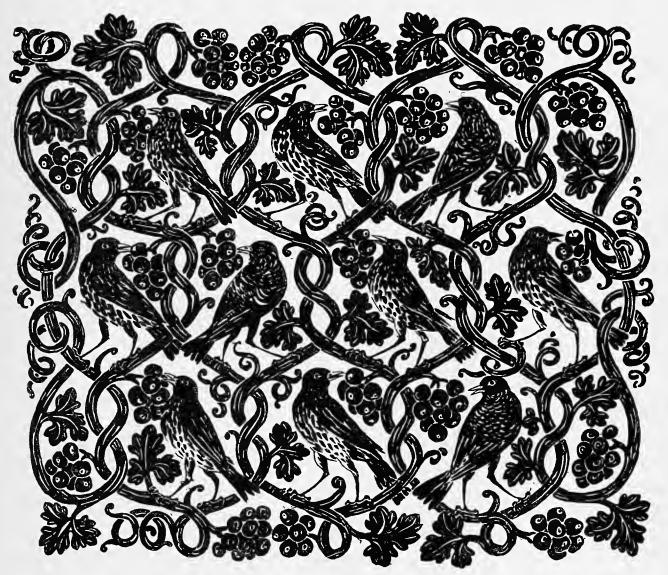


FIG. 27.—A SELF-ENCLOSING DIAPER.

Arabesques are, on the whole, less suitable for framing than semés, and diapers least of all, because, of the three, they are the most formal and geometrical; and the act of framing a design has a natural tendency to add some formality to it, while a diaper has

a sufficiently formal character of its own. Being primarily a composition of lines, it is somewhat inappropriate to bind it with more lines. A better way to edge a design of that sort is shown in fig. 27. Such interlacing is a common trick among Celtic carvers; and you will constantly find it in grilles and gates of wrought and twisted ironwork. In the latter case the addition of a plain frame is often necessary, but the distinction between it and the rest of the design is not often insisted on.

These examples of the use of a frame do not by any means exhaust the subject of its functions. From its association with pictures the frame has got a popular meaning which must not mislead us here; for while it would be impossible to forget its restricted use in that connection, we must remember that it has



FIG. 28, a.

other meanings as well. We speak, for instance, of the framework of a house, the bodily frame, and even of a frame of mind. I use it here in the sense of a pattern enclosing a clearly defined



Fig. 28, b.—The Frame Alone as a Form of Ornament.

space, without regard to what it may be made of, or to what use it may be put. That, of course, is an important question; but, first of all, let us see if a frame is not a possible form of ornament by itself.

Long ago we led the spiral round corners, and were tempted away to think of ornamenting the space so enclosed. If we return to it now, we shall find that the spiral in its new character makes a by no means despicable form of ornament, without any thought of what it may be surrounding (fig. 28). Regarding it, too, from a purely historical point of view, we should expect to find spirals placed at all sorts of angles to each other, and even enclosing spaces,

without laying any stress on the fact, other than that spirals could be so drawn. This would happen for a long time, and even after the space inside had been timidly occupied, the frame would remain the most important factor of the picture. And this, indeed, was the case in the Middle Ages, till the artist was gradually evolved from the handicraftsman, and undertook the decoration of the inside of the frame as his special province.

An empty frame has still, however, its distinct uses, if you won't think of it as that part of a picture which a modern artist is not responsible for. As a method of decorating a plate, or as the border round a tablecloth, or even as the moulding round a window, it answers its purpose very well. We cannot possibly lay down any rule to govern its shape or size. Round, oval, square, oblong, and polygonal frames are all right in their right places, and if I prefer thick ones to thin ones it is only because I have a greater occasion to use the former.

Among the uses to which the frame by itself is put, we may mention such ornaments as brooches and rings. The ring has, of course, numerous associations apart from personal decoration, and other significations besides betrothal. It is always wise to refresh our invention by the discovery of other connections than the most familiar.

While many frames maintain a position as complete forms of ornament, their value is not necessarily injured by the addition of further decoration inside. We have already seen that the semé is quite an appropriate feature there, but in that case the frame was added to complete an already conceived design. Generally, it is an easier matter to make a suitable frame to fit your design, than to invent a design to fit your frame; and though in the process of evolution the frame evidently precedes the conception of what it afterwards encloses; in practice, which so constantly reverses tradition, the design precedes, and the frame becomes a subsequent accessory.

I have no intention here of considering the question of what sort of frames are suitable for pictures. From the picture-painter's point of view, a frame is only an inferior, but unfortunately indispensable, adjunct to his own production, and modern high-art criticism, whose horizon is bounded by such narrow limits, ignores them with contempt. The decorator, however, with his wider view of things, cannot separate the one from the other. Of the two the frame is the more traditional, and therefore perhaps the more important in his eyes; but then he does not necessarily regard it as gilt stucco or carved oak. This "fine art" of ours, which has reduced the frame to such a moribund convention, is a *cul de sac*, a blind alley, in the history of traditional Art. There is no escape from it, struggle as we may, but by frank confession and self-denying retreat.

That absurd unconstructive construction, the picture-frame, is the last hold of handicraft on Art; a degraded thing, essential, indeed, to complete the artist's labour, but in the making of which he scorns to take any hand. Different in material, without any relation as a rule between its design and the picture, its only mission is to isolate what it protects from the surroundings its presence has made incongruous. In spite of all this, it is still faithful to the first law of all hierarchic tradition, "Ich dien," and does faithful service in a somewhat forlorn cause. We know that the picture in its present shape is ridiculously unornamental from an architectural point of view. That point of view is finally the only correct one. You can turn a room into a picture-gallery, but don't on that account imagine that you have decorated its walls; you have only prevented its walls from being decorated. By all means engage an artist to paint your walls, but see that he paints his picture there and not in his studio A wall is a useful thing, and you are quite right in turning it into a picture; but hanging pictures on it is not at all the same thing. You do not make a vase more beautiful by tying a ribbon round its neck as if it were a cat: you must paint on the vase itself and burn your colours into the clay. Then your picture and your wall are one. If you can induce your artist to do this, he will learn two things: firstly, that the frame or border is an integral part of the design, and must not be left to inferior workmen to execute; and,

secondly, that all decoration should, as far as possible, be done on the spot.

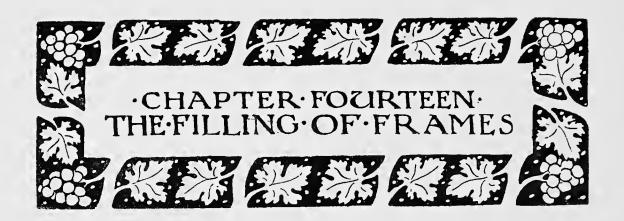
I am afraid many artists would hardly appreciate the innovation; they are conscious of being deeply compromised, and feel that their pictures, which pass at present unquestioned, require the conditions they are used to. And that is true! A picture, with its atmosphere, perspective, and chiaroscuro, is not decoration, whatever it is. It wants a frame besides, and your whole patronage, if you can give it. The question is how long you can. For the truth is that a change of material and a change of motive would necessitate a change of style as well, and it is hard to give up what we have attained with difficulty, or to forsake ideas we may not yet have suspected. Nevertheless, it will sooner or later be necessary to do so, and we shall be fortunate if we escape having to lay bricks instead of painting on them. While pictures are painted in the artist's studio, the decorative arts, when it is possible to do so, ought to be executed where they are meant to remain, for work that is done on the spot cannot help taking into account the architectural exigencies and eccentricities in its neighbourhood; and, if the artist is sensitive, he will be influenced by the feelings of the people who live there, or touched by the uses the building he is helping to complete is going to be put to. And the result will be that his efforts, however humble, will harmonise with their surroundings and become part and parcel of the life of the place.

My criticisms on the tendency of current Art are unlikely to make many converts. The influence of fashion is very strong; nor am I disposed to assert that pictorial art has achieved all it was sent in the world to do. Let those who feel further possibilities in that direction follow their bent, and may success and more light wait on their patience. Let the young artist, if Nature really appeals to him more than anything else, be as unaffectedly honest to his aspirations as the times will allow. We live in an age of transition, and are bound to follow originality wherever it comes to the surface. But if the age is one of transition now, it will soon be one of stern

FRAMES.

utilitarianism as well. That is an end, or rather a beginning of better things, devoutly to be wished. At present, Art bids for popularity by hook or by crook: by audacious advertisement, by indecencies, by pandering to religious sentiment, by raking up every affectation that will startle the public if it cannot interest or even amuse them. But the strain of this competition for popular approval only destroys the very possibility of Art. Its joy, for all who can give and all who can receive it, must spring from a peaceful apprenticeship to simple human wants and simple human feelings.





THE main tendency of the more intellectual Art of the nineteenth century has no doubt been in revolt against traditions that have lost their power to please, and is also inspired by a sudden perception of the beauties of natural scenery, a subject which, except in certain aspects, does not appear to have appealed to artists before recent times. The grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is forgotten, its flowers, with their innocent forms and luminous colours, were dear to the hearts of the mediæval artists, but do not appear to have appealed to the grey ages between their days and our own. It was only the palpably romantic side of nature, its rocks and castles, its lightnings and thunders, that inspired the precursors of modern landscape Art, and even then the feeling about it was theatrical and second-hand. The stereotyped romantic was the only point of view. A larger conception of the charm of natural scenery happily reigns to-day. We have learnt the necessity and value of fresh air and country conditions, but the fungus growth of city squalor has diminished our chance of enjoying them, and made them precious. What is precious to-day is beautiful to-morrow, and already homely weeds are hawked in town streets, and we treasure the symbols of simplicity in the midst of the wealth and waste and luxury of London.

This appreciation of nature was surely significant and welcome after the long dearth of bloodless convention, and Art was not slow

to echo the public feeling in its own way, by making pictures of the things we had learnt to love; nor was it to be expected but that a new theory of Art should supplant the old, and every one believe that the greatest Art was that which displayed or, as it was called, revealed nature most faithfully. Were such a standard possible, how serenely we might sail on to approximate perfection! But look at this spear of summer grass: can any Art in the world do more than libel it miserably? It is in such simple things as these that our craft becomes so inadequate. With a sunset or a city we can take liberties, but not with a blade of grass. If literal truth alone were the standard of excellence we should all become photographers, and when we had discovered the transmission of colour through the negative, and had corrected a few vagaries in the lens, we might reasonably hope to have attained the summit of our ambition. But I do not think that photography will ever become a dangerous rival to Art, because there is something in Art we give greater credit to than even truth: something that photography cannot possibly give us, because it lies in the artist and not in nature, and though we can dissect a man's body and tell all his bones and his bumps, his imagination will always escape the shackles of science. It is certainly strange that in the face of this widely accepted theory of truth, and side by side with it, the exact opposite should have been held, and, however unconsciously, have directed our best judgment, that Art is commendable not for the reality, but for the unreality of its revelation. This is only another way of saying that we are all idealists in spite of ourselves, and that though we can recognise the delicacy of the grass, not even a miraculous counterfeit, much less a laboured imitation of it, would enhance our estimate of the power of Art.

What are we to do, then? Give glory to God for creating Nature, and giving us power to enjoy it, and show ourselves His children by exercising our own faculties of invention. Then we shall discover that the tools we thought so clumsy and inadequate are marvellous fingers and hands, ready to help and direct our imagination. And we shall find that the more we have loved Nature, the more

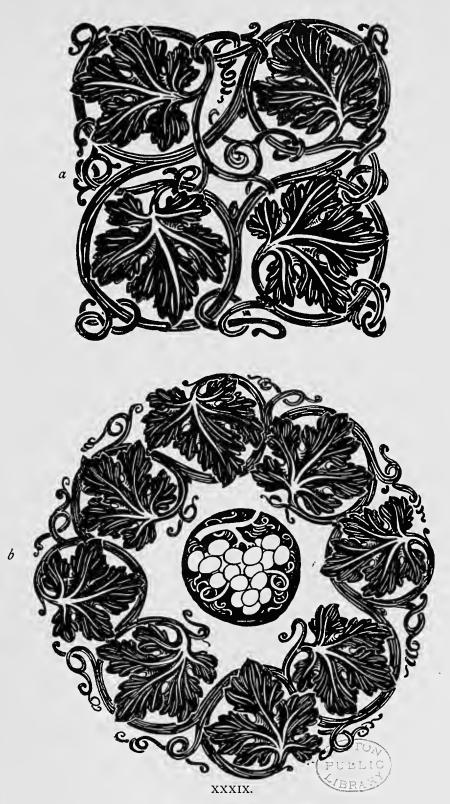
equipped we are to add our share to hers, and the more capable of revealing to others less, perhaps, the mask we think so fair, than the love and intense feelings our contact with her brings.

I do not say we are not to copy Nature; on the contrary, so long as it does not become the end instead of the means, we cannot study Nature in every way too much; but we are to study her in order to know her, not in order to make money out of her nor to show how cleverly we can sketch. If we had perfect memories we should never want to take notes. We do so, then, to increase the material we shall afterwards have to use; to add letters to our alphabet, notes to our keyboard. But the tune must come out of our own hearts before the notes will take their proper places.

So, when we assert that Art is bound by conventions which appear to have little in common with Nature, it is not because we are blind to her infinite beauties, but rather because we feel something of the same uplift in ourselves which bids us put forth leaves of our own, and become ourselves an intimate part of the world we were looking at before too much from the outside.

Art, then, is the artificial limitation and disposition of natural forms; an analysis of Nature, if you like, but based on analogies between things where science sees none: analogies of intention and soul, not of construction and body. It is a curious mixture of opposites, of freedom and restraint, of truth and fiction, of the impossible and the likely; but while excess of either is dangerous, it is better to keep the artificial or conventional factor prominent. We can return to Nature when we please, but it takes centuries to recover traditions. In practice, for example, if you have a curtain you want to decorate, determine first whether a frieze or a semé would be the more suitable form of decoration for it before making up your mind what objects the frieze or the semé is to consist of.

I think some such preface as this is necessary to keep us straight on the road of tradition, and to account, as we proceed, for the conventions that grow more and more marked as our horizon widens



THE ORIGIN OF THE CENTRAL FIGURE.

and we enlist more acquaintances from the outside world. We have already, in the last chapter, dealt with the frame, preparatory to evolving other forms from it. If we review the subject we shall see that frames may be roughly divided into spiral frames and frieze frames. Without a central occupant, and often with one, the edge of the frame is usually a broken one, however symmetrical its main contour may be, and this will the more easily allow us to reduce the frame to such small dimensions that it ceases to be a frame in any sense of the term. Let us take the spiral frame first, and in its simplest shape (Plate XXXIX., a). This, with its four chambers, cavities, or caves, is not at first so easy to draw as it seems, but if you look at it closely you will see that the basal line of it takes the form of a dumbbell or an oval which has had its sides squeezed in. There is very little central space left in this design, and what there is is occupied by a stray bud or tendril, which I want you to notice because it is the beginning of great things. The design as it stands appears more like a scheme for decorating a tile or panel, or method of treating the square in a solid fashion, than as in any way related to a frame; it is nevertheless from the traditional point of view the simplest way in which a spiral (or line twisted first to the right and then to the left) may enclose a space with the least possible cost of material and energy, and this unimportant-looking bud in the middle will grow to become the parent of those types of design which we are accustomed to think the most important ones; designs of definite shape and definite meaning, opposed to the spiral and frieze because they present a concentrated shape and often include a central figure or subject. The origin and development of this kind of design is our present business, and I have preferred to discover it in a way that will not break the continuity of our tradition rather than to find an independent origin for it.

Let us now follow the clue that this simple treatment suggests. The next step will be a design with six chambers; the next one with eight (Plate XXXIX., b). These are either square or round designs, according to whether the chambers are deep or shallow. Beyond this point, however, the design takes a circular shape when

the number of interior chambers is uneven, and a rectangular shape when it is even. The construction of this process is shown in fig. 29 to better advantage than in the finished examples in the plate. As the spiral increases the number of its chambers it gets relatively thinner, and retires before the central figure it gave birth to in its first form; very soon they are too distinct to be any longer united. The child must leave its mother and learn to live alone, while the parent can only guard and cherish it at a distance. As the spiral recedes before its offspring the latter becomes more and more important as a central figure, and whether it absorbs it or not, dominates the whole of the central space. So the series proceeds,

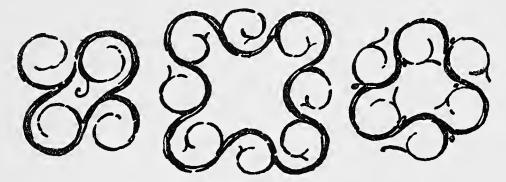


FIG. 29.—FRAME STRUCTURES.

with a surrounding spiral of less and less calibre, till it becomes too attenuated to retain the character of a spiral, and another tradition must succeed. I have chosen to illustrate this tale with a vine spiral, but we must not forget that any spiral of a simple nature is equally suited to demonstrate the same results.

The normal spiral, as usual, gives us the best, because the most gradual development; but an adaptation of the chain-spiral, which we dismissed rather unceremoniously in the second chapter, produces singularly well, though in a somewhat different manner, the effect of a central figure surrounded by a spiral border. The character of the chain-spiral, when we first fell in with it, was unsuited to the insertion of leaves; and as our tradition took its course that way, we were obliged to leave it till other objects, which did not require any

attachment to the stem, could be introduced into its links. Then it became a very vital form of ornament, and one that combines the flow of a spiral with the stability of a frieze. As a frame pure and simple it is also very effective. For our present purpose we will reduce it as we did the spiral frame to the least possible number of links with which it can still enclose a space, however small (Plate XL., a). The frame is reduced here to just two interlacing links, the underlying theme of many a Celtic labyrinth, and capable, as we know, of rushing off into infinite subtleties of involution. Here, however, it must learn to restrain itself to more Teutonic purposes. We cannot go at length into the corresponding growth of this tradition; but Plate XL., b, will illustrate its second condition, after which the frame can expand in lots of ways, and give our ingenuity plenty of exercise. These designs, based on the chain-spiral, are more suited to the introduction of animal life than the more vegetable spirals; and the markedly abstract nature of their construction is eminently adapted to emphasise the central chamber: so much so, in fact, that a circle with smaller circles interlaced with and round it becomes the typical instance of the tradition.

This use of the chain-spiral, with its character half-way between the normal spiral and the frieze, leads us to the second method of evolving the central design from the frieze-frame, or, as we saw could be done in the last chapter, by the reduction of a semé till it consists of one central figure with the others ranged round it, much in the same way as when a chairman is elected he takes the place of honour in the centre of his former compeers. This tradition is a very simple and obvious one; but for that very reason difficult to achieve in a satisfactory manner, because when we are no longer told exactly what to do, we must trust more to our own instincts to dispose the figures, and our process should consequently be as cautious as it was with the frieze. We ought, consequently, to pay the greatest attention possible to the disposition of main masses, the lines of construction and the alternation of tones of subject and background, whenever these occur. It is just because they are so unobtrusive that



these most important things elude our notice. There are two examples in Plate XLI., and a thousand others can be easily obtained by a little pluck and careful regard to the fundamental necessities of this species of decoration.

When two traditions tend to run together, as in this case, we must draw an arbitrary line between them, or else we shall find ourselves being carried round on the wheel instead of noting its passage. Tradition is a revolving wheel, its divisions and degrees do indeed coincide when the spokes are confused in rapid revolution; but in order to number them and discover their order and relation, we must stop it and study it part by part. Or we can compare tradition to a sea with ever-returning advance of tides, or to a pond we have thrown a stone into, and from that impulse the ripples widen out in circles till they touch the shore. Here we are at the extreme reach of the wave, the tyre end of the spoke, the tip of a branch of the tree of life; and the farther we get from the central force the swifter the action, the greater the variety, the more complex the relation. make one link in the chain of tradition inferior to another would be to underrate the strength of the whole chain, whose greatest strength is its weakest link, or to forget the presence of the central spirit which inspires them all.

The confession of a predominant feature, a central figure, in these designs, demands a moral as well as a purely æsthetic invention in the artist. Don't let me frighten you by saying this. All I mean is, that as soon as we make a prominent position, we must choose the most suitable person to occupy it. Thus, to fill the chambers of a frame with sheep-dogs, and put a wolf in the middle, is, unless we imply that he has been caught there and is being kept out of harm's way, not wholesome, but diabolic Art. The aim of all things is to aspire from being wolves to becoming sheep-dogs, and if we venture to put the small before the great, it would be in the spirit of the wise men who came to reverence a mere child in its mother's lap. We must look at it as a symbol, the emblem of an enviable faculty we would be glad to attain, or a mystery we long to contemplate. We cannot be artists without exercising some instinctive sense of this

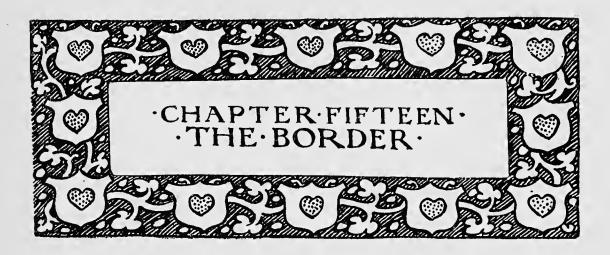




XLI. Adaptation of Semé to Frames.

hierarchy in all forms of Art which demand it, and in every kingdom of Nature which supplies us with the materials of design. The fruit is greater than the leaf, the vine than the weed. Her children cling round their mother. The sun rules the planets. All animals obey man. All men, except anarchists, recognise the superiority of some of their number, and are willing to obey them. We place Herakles in the midst of his labours, and Christ surrounded by His disciples.





THE modern picture is, of course, the inevitable outcome of past tradition; and in the face of such a confession it may appear paradoxical to assert that the salvation of Art depends on a return to handicraft. But not only does it appear impossible to expect any structural alteration in so highly artificial a production as a picture has come to be, but we seem to have reached one of those historical climaxes when new ideals push aside, as effete, old conventions of all kinds, to institute a new order of things. Art is, after all, only the echo of the dominant feeling of its time; and its traditions can only follow the traditions of our social and political life. If we believe that a new era is dawning, and few people will be found to deny that greater changes have taken place in the present century than during any similar length of period of which we have record, it would be illogical to refuse our Art a corresponding change. If we were advocating ideas which were entirely new, our proposals might be stigmatised as nostrums; but there is really nothing novel or extraordinary about them. The picture was a true form of Art while it still supplied unchallenged the chief demand for imaginative expression, while its connection with previous forms of Art was still palpable; but the enormous increase in the numbers of a well-to-do class, which is rather intelligent than educated, makes it impossible for an Art to be popular which is becoming more and more difficult to understand, except by an initiated few. The chief reason, however, why the old forms are approaching extinction as a popular expression is that, owing to machinery and the spread of an unmitigated and commercial intellectualism, the real demand of this large class is not that it may be amused, but that it may be taught how to amuse itself.

"Give us Art," is the dumb cry of the machine-slave, and that huge and more pitiable section of the public which is rich and has nothing to do. "Teach us to do something to relieve the dull monotony of business or of ennui!" "Feast your eyes on this impressionistic harmony and be thankful," is all the artist can reply. And he adds, "If you don't understand it, I'm sorry to say I cannot help you."

In all reactions, however drastic, the thread of a continuous tradition should be preserved. In all reformations an apostolic succession must consecrate our new creed; and a slight review of the leading motives in the history of recent Art will reveal that they point, almost inevitably, to some sort of return to fundamental principles and that phase of imaginative industry which we have associated with handicrafts.

Two great artistic forces have been at work during the last century,—the influence of Turner and the influence of the pre-Raphaelite movement. Both were revolutionary: the former in the treatment of landscape, the latter in its treatment of the figure and its immediate surroundings. The æsthetic school is the result of the pre-Raphaelite movement; the naturalistic school owes its origin to Turner. The feelings they expressed and excited may be, perhaps, defined as a feeling for something pretty and a feeling for something true.

No one yet knows the extent of Turner's phenomenal genius. Our admiration for him remains as yet an uncompleted epic. His art was conceived and contained within pictorial limits. Those were the conditions he was born into: necessary for the production of a great artist at the beginning of this century. He found an old tree throttled with ivy, but still alive; he cleared it of the encumbrance, and the tree rejoiced in exuberance of renewed foliage before

it fell a prey to old age. He reconciled Nature again with Art, and consciously or unconsciously coloured and composed it with his own thoughts. He was a genius: that is to say, he was a man who made other people see things as he wished them to. He anticipated and excelled all his successors. He began and ended an era all by himself, but in spite of his transcendent qualifications he was consistently reverent to the traditions he superseded, and came to fulfil, not to destroy, the law and prophets of his craft.

On the other hand, the pre-Raphaelites, pretending to revert to tradition, flung it to the winds, and in consequence a great deal of their work is wilfully ignorant, and much of it amazingly ugly. There can be no excuse for the arrogance of despising four centuries of thought, especially when they immediately precede us, and the real value of the pre-Raphaelite movement lies more in the change of feeling it represents than in the change of style it adopted. The relics of mediæval Art appeared to the eyes of a few sensitive and creative people replete with faith and vitality, and exerted a fascination which nothing of modern manufacture possessed. They tried to realise those feelings in the same way that Turner realised his; in a way they should have rejected, in order to be consistent to their principles. They made pictures of them; and because they found mediæval Art was sincere, declared that Art must be mediævalised. No greater mistake could have been made, for from rejecting tradition they fell into the narrowest groove of it. They failed to revive the faith of the past, and only galvanised its corpse. Their dreams have nevertheless borne fruit where they were most sincere; and the fair externals in which they dressed their models, the clothes they wore, the tables they sat at, the chairs they sat on, and the houses they lived in, have had a far-reaching influence on our lives, and have resulted in an extraordinary renaissance of such accessories, which, if only the outside of the platter, has prepared the way for a more intimate change in our ways of thinking.

In their application to handicraft, the combination of these two schools of feeling ought to produce very important results. The feeling for something true, if it is an earnest one, should transfer its sphere of work from useless pictures to useful objects; and the feeling for something pretty, which the pre-Raphaelites have left us with, should, when inspired by a modern instead of a mediævalised faith, restore honour to ornament, and happiness to industry.

But though social conditions may necessitate a revival of handicraft in the manufacture of useful things, no ornamentation of them is possible unless we have strong feelings that this ornamentation will be the means of expressing. Beautiful shapes, beautiful colours, beautiful patterns are neither accident nor science. They are the way in which we say that life is a pleasure and not a burden, and that what we see about us is full of mystery and "very good." Art is a religion. Art is content and peace. Perhaps we shall have no Art till we get these things. Certainly we shall get no Art till we get strong feelings of some kind. The picture of a pretty woman will not make a pretty picture if it is painted by a misanthrope, any more than a knowledge of bones and muscles will enable a puritan to carve a Greek statue. While pictures can minister to the finest feelings of the time,—not the isolated feelings of hyper-sensitive individuals, but the altruism that admires, pities, and loves,—they will hold their own in our esteem; but when they cease to do so, either because artists have found other ideals, or because those feelings are being expressed better in other ways, we shall cease to be interested in them, or anxious to prolong a custom which has lost its power to help us, though we shall always value specimens that have become classical because they once fulfilled that mission.

The arbitrary choice of a medium for the expression of strong national emotion is as marked as it is incomprehensible. It would be difficult to explain why at one time music, at another painting, at another verse, should monopolise the imaginative output. It may be the result of accident, if there is such a thing as accident; more likely it is the consequence of huge laws whose effects we may sometimes be fortunate enough to observe and profit by, though their causes and action are wider than our intellects can grasp. Certain it is, that we are generally very late to notice when the spirit of Art has left its temporary body, for a more suitable lodging somewhere

else. No sooner has the custom of a few years deluded us into thinking the habit is a permanent one, than we are left in the lurch to worship a scarecrow instead of a god. I believe we are in such a position now, or soon shall be. Our keenest feelings, those that answer to our most crying needs, are not ones which pictures and statues can easily gratify; and Count Tolstoy, in his last trenchant work on the nature of Art, is to a great extent justified in declaring that our Art is not, as it should be, the expression of an universal sentiment, but is devoted to the interests of only a special class of people, and clothed in a language which is obscure to every one else.

Politics aside, the Art of the future must be a democratic one: that is to say, things have come to a pass when, for civilisation's sake, we must all have a common interest in the common welfare. The redemption of labour is the keynote of the future. Labour? Yes, labour for all! but labour that will employ hearts as well as heads and hands to execute.

An uncompromising naturalism cannot tolerate the principles of design. That is a great pity, for design is what makes it possible to adapt Nature to our use. She supplies the material, we the methods. The freedom of just order, the true relation of things, the dignity of office and the equality of individuals, hierarchy and democracy (which are not opposed but are really essential to each other), these make up the laws of design, and cannot be disregarded for long with impunity.

The main difficulty, as I have said, is to get artists to realise that liberty is consistent with obedience, spontaneity with tradition. That can only be proved by experience, but it is surely worth the trial. Let any one adopt what tradition he pleases. I claim no infallibility for my own; its imperfections only prove the need for deeper investigations and wider application. The study of tradition is an intensely interesting one, especially in view of a practical issue; and the evolution of ideas these conventions record, has come to me with so little effort that I have often been amazed at the facility with which one form of ornament has glided into another.

I have felt it necessary to preface the present chapter in this

way, because I am sometimes obliged to call that condition of design we have reached a picture, but dare not do so in the face of its usual representative for fear of being misunderstood. Nothing is more curious than the contrast between the feverish waste of original effort spent on the fine or useless arts, and the feeble residue of imagination that lingers in the serviceable ones. A recent author has discovered relics of spontaneous treatment in the decoration of pie-crust; I might, in all seriousness, instance others in the rough hand-painted but conventional wreaths and foliage of common earthenware, exported, since there is no demand for it here, to attract the simple-minded, and possibly progressive savage; in the manufacture and decoration of Dutch dolls and painted toys; and the ornamental quilting of babies' bibs by East-end workgirls. Your fashionable artist does not recognise such arts as these, but if he despises them he is also partly responsible for their degradation, and will have to learn that we want, aye, and will have, our meat and drink nicely served, and our babies prettily dressed and amused, before we can listen to what he can tell us.

The complete design or "picture" consists generally of two parts: the outside or border, which is all that remains of the original frame or spiral; and the inside or central part, which the frame in its condensed form gave birth to, and which we have watched gradually expand and push the maternal spiral outwards as it grew. A border is not always essential to a complete design. As the lineal descendant of the spiral it supplies the conventional quality necessary to all design, but if the central portion has strong conventional characteristics of its own, a border will often be unnecessary (fig. 30). The modern picture has a frame because it is never really conventional. With its frame it passes for an ornament. A coat of arms, on the other hand, is so admittedly conventional that it seldom requires any frame or border at all. The simplest possible border will evidently be a single line, thick or thin as may be required. Architects have been at considerable pains, when more organic mouldings were out of reach or fashion, in inventing combinations of lines of different sizes and degrees of shadow, and it is well to realise the importance and effect of a few of them; but as a mere line can hardly be said to possess much emotional value, the student of design would do wisely not to resort to its use more than is necessary to give his whole work the conventional character it requires (fig. 31). The absence of interest in a line, even a crooked one, when used as a border, is evidence that the enclosed design is itself formal enough. The most organic designs are consequently often enclosed in this manner, since a more organic border calls for some attention to itself and shares or completes the interest of what it contains. Hence the more organic our borders become, the less

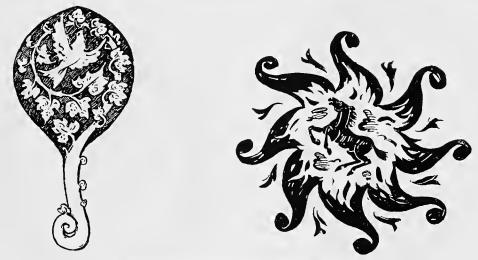


Fig. 30.—Types of Design not requiring a Border.

organic, and the more conventional, or perhaps suggestive, we may expect the rest of the design to be.

Next to borders which consist of a line or lines only, comes the addition, within or on the line, of a spiral or frieze of some kind or another (figs. 32, 33). Borders of this kind necessarily retain the severity of the first borders, but increase their interest. After this, we may remove its enclosing lines from the spiral, or change the plain line into a zigzag or spiral of increasing complexity (fig. 34 and Plate XLII.). Our process in this chapter is the reverse of that in the last. Our object then was to evolve a central ornament from the frame as an earlier form of decoration. As soon as we

had done so, the frame became subordinate to what it had created, and here we are reviewing its functions in the light of its reduced prestige. Its diminished fortunes are mitigated, however, by a renewed intimacy with its former offspring, whose sentiment it has to echo, complete or restrain. If, for instance, the subject of the design is a boat, a wave-spiral would be a fitting border to it, or a frieze or spiral of fishes, or some other object suggestive of the perils or pleasures of the sea. Probably such a border, besides being symbolically the most appropriate, would constructively be the best



FIG. 31.-A DESIGN WITH PLAIN BORDER.



Fig. 32.—Plain Border enriched with Frieze.

as well, because it would repeat some of the curves and consequently the thoughts of the picture inside it, and manifest in this way not only the unity of the whole, but that analogy between different things that I have already touched on.

I would the more willingly insist on this point because the tendency is often to magnify the difference between picture and border, rather than to insist on their dependence on each other. It is true that the border supplies a conventional necessity often lacking in the other part of the design, but the difference between a true

An instance of some such instinctive evolution of borders it is, however, not impossible to illustrate. We will imagine the design we wish to surround and complete a more or less circular one. Our first step will be to definitely mark this shape by drawing a line round it; and here we ought to notice that a border or frame is pre-eminently necessary when the design is a light one on a dark ground, or even when the ground has any value at all in colour



FIG. 34.—OUTER LINE OF BORDER REMOVED.

or tone. Round this, at a suitable distance from it, describe one of the elementary spiral lines, and fill in the space so enclosed with colour (as in Plate XLII. and fig. 37). Here you have a border of a sufficiently solid character, with not necessarily any more definite symbolism or arbitrary connection with the meaning of the enclosed picture than their common descent from the spiral gives it. This is, indeed, a great deal, but it is generally one that is to be felt more than expressed, while the variety of original spirals allows considerable

choice and latitude to the artist. A very evident quality in many of the borders obtained in this way, especially in the ones which are derived from wave and fire spirals, is the sense of motion they convey. Of course schemes of design that give a feeling of rest or inactivity have their peculiar charm as well, but the feeling of motion that one of these borders gives to the whole design is

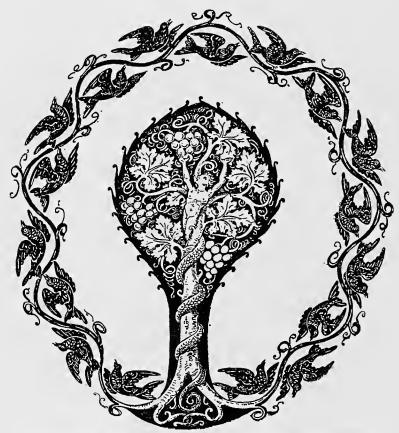


FIG. 35.-THE RELATION OF THE BORDER TO ITS ENCLOSED DESIGN.

quite characteristic of our processes, and can be typically illustrated in another way.

Here (fig. 36) is a star with rays. While these rays are equal and straight, the star remains immovably ecclesiastical, a type of the old rigid style of symbol. If you vary the length of the rays, you get a twinkling or radiating star. Now give the rays a twist, and your star moves and gyrates. Lastly, diminish the length of the

rays and increase the size of the star, and it becomes a sun, and in the fire and light of it the best possible standard of a border's significance (Plate XLII.). "The sun is God." And as in Him we all live and *move* and have our being, this form of the Sun in his glory may remain the fundamental type of the completed design. The sun is but a circumference in which we may insert any subject, which will at once, unless we ourselves forget the meaning of the myth, assume a solar or stellar dignity. The rays, too, without any diminution of consequence, may descend, as rays do, to earth, and breaking there into buds and leaves, blossom and fruit, become useful borders to earthly things as well as heavenly ones (fig. 37).

So far we have limited the border, and the shape of the design



FIG. 36.-THE EVOLUTION OF A STAR.

it serves, mainly to circular or square forms; but just because we do not pay unnecessary attention to their mathematical accuracy, but draw them with "careful carelessness," our squares and circles will often be more like ovals and oblongs, and we shall discover the occasional advantage of preferring definite shapes of this kind. Besides these, there are triangles, crosses, diamonds, pentagons, and hexagons. These must be drawn more or less in the same not too mathematical way, and are often very useful for insertion in spaces of irregular dimensions. Many of these undoubtedly have philosophical or symbolical meanings attached to them, whose value is not weakened but rather enhanced when drawn by the hand and eye alone; for where mathematical instruments are brought into play, there is always the implied suggestion that the artist has no interest in the

matter, while if he prefers to draw a more or less geometrical form with his own hand, we must believe that he means something by it, or at any rate that he feels that the rest of his design would be injured by a too mathematical interference with it.

Ecclesiastical symbols seldom coincide with artistic ones, because the priest is as seldom an artist as the artist is a priest. Ecclesiastical

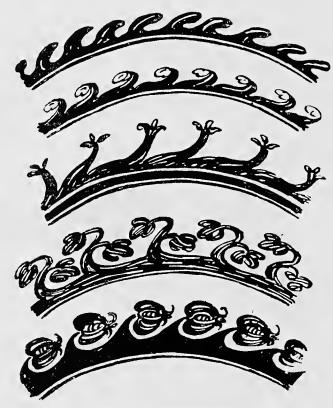


FIG. 37.—Types of Borders.

symbols are rigid, artistic ones free. "What is full of life is a symbol of Life," says Sir George Birdwood. That is the law of the true and artistic symbol. Its business is to enlighten, not to enslave; and it is therefore distinct from the ecclesiastical symbol, which wilfully conceals a mystery in order that the priest may benefit by a monopoly of its meaning. It is consequently to the priest's advantage that superstition should continue. But a true symbol reveals life to those who have it, without need of interpretation. There is no intrinsic

power in the sacred monogram because it spells a sacred name, or in the form of a cross because Christ died on one, or in a Bible because it contains valuable truths. We do not treasure the lawyer's letter which tells us of the fortune we have come into so much as the flowers a friend sends us as a symbol of his memory and love. The end of Art is to translate noble ideas into living symbols. It is valuable in exact proportion, not to the ideas it is supposed to stand for, but to the ideas it actually transmits. You may be told that a circle is a valuable symbol because it represents eternity. Perhaps it does; but generally, and most appropriately, it stands for a symbol of nothing at all. If we turn the circle into a serpent, and put its tail in its mouth, it begins to have some interest, but is still theosophically stiff-backed. If it is coiled in sensitive repetition of twist, and ingenious concealment of end and origin, nobody cares what it is supposed to mean, because every one who feels it has an impression conveyed to him of the charm of evolution, which is at any rate a more tangible conception than Eternity. Abstract ideas are quite useless, are indeed unthinkable, till they touch the earth; and so, before these geometrical figures can serve any decorative purpose, we must draw something interesting inside them. Then, if they mean anything, some impression of it may be produced.

It would be outside our purpose to discuss the meaning these traditional shapes possess. All I can do is to point out that, whether they mean much or little, they are very valuable. Besides the circle, square, and other geometrical figures, there are other traditionally decorative shapes, in the form of things which have a more definite meaning for us, as the cross, shield, almond, heart, vase, seed and tree shapes.

We must not confine the use of these traditional shapes entirely to what they are usually associated with. The cross, for instance, need not invariably become a crucifix, but the feeling of self-sacrifice will often pervade what we carve or paint on it. A heart will give its own sentiment to all it embraces. A shield will carry our pretensions in a defiant manner; and so with the others, each will

surround its contents with special suggestions, into which we need not fully enter here. They are world-wide symbols, whose significance will widen every time they are thoughtfully used, and the artist who uses them in the proper spirit must discover for himself new meanings for the old forms, and new relations between things that before were strange to each other.





Art than the pictures it gives children to look at, because every artist who draws for children feels that they are naturally quite at home in the world of make-believe that he tries to remember or pretends to realise. An inclination to the grotesque or the unreal is indeed one of the first and strongest signs of a progressive art, and the modern fashion for fantastic designs in advertising posters and illustrations to books for children would be full of promise if it was not generally as empty of real imagination as true grotesque is full of it.

False grotesque, like the contents of a witch's caldron, "eye of newt and toe of frog, wool of bat and tongue of dog," is a mere muddle of horrible things, collected from the odd corners of creation to startle us with their ugliness and shock us with their utter absence of probability and meaning. A true grotesque, on the other hand, is a symbol for a special set of ideas or feelings, for which Nature has not yet found a name, deliberately and seriously conceived as an organic whole. It marks the extreme type of the imaginative as opposed to that imitative theory of Art on which our modern system of teaching depends, and which not only hinders a better method from being introduced, but prevents our recognising the characteristics of imaginative work when we come across it. Let us look at a real grotesque, a Greek centaur, for instance, from the

British Museum. Here you have a true grotesque, because the artist wanted to combine the natures of a man and a horse. Or look at one of those wonderful designs among the Egyptian tapestries that connect Greek tradition with Christian spirit, a formal and grotesque arrangement of birds and beasts and flowers and men, a design full of quite intentional suggestions about our relation to the universe. We should all be naturally inclined to call such a design as this "grotesque," because the drawing is often so inaccurate, according to our received ideas, that it becomes quite comical; but it has all the same a real claim to the epithet in its nobler sense, because it realises in a marvellous unity things and thoughts that on earth we can only pray to see joined. Or, as a specimen of more serious illustration to a fairy tale, look at a typical Richter drawing. Not a line is there which does not express a childlike pleasure and sympathy with what it represents. From the rampant vine at our feet to the pigeon's cooing on the highest and quaintest gable, all is vivid, vital, jaunty, Richteresque, fresh with vigorous appreciation of all he draws. Modern to the backbone, he at least does not believe it necessary to live in the thirteenth century in order to produce good Art. He is quite content with the times he lives in, and has conjured by the most wonderful magic in the world an immortal classic, uncompromising and spontaneous, out of a dirty, poor, innocent, inæsthetic German village.

That is the right sort of illustration to a fairy-tale, and one that will please all children, old and young alike. Indeed, I think Art has no higher mission, for fairy-tales are the wisdom of the world, epitomised by ages of experience into the shortest and most forcible shape, and as important to the man of business and action as to the poet and artist.

The first characteristic of a fairy-tale is its brevity. It has no room to take account of any particular time or place; and so it falls, naturally, into the form of a fable or allegory; and the right sort of illustration for it should be as concentrated, in its own way, as the story is, and become an abbreviated statement of the most important facts, with as few accessories and as little local colouring

as possible. But unless the artist first of all believes in the story himself, he cannot illustrate it; and no amount of academic skill and conscious facility of technique can make up to him or us for the loss of that essential faith.

Since children learn to read from pictures long before they learn to read from print, it is very important that the pictures we give them should be as concise as possible; for unless they are so, they will make no impression on that keenest critic, a child's instinct. Our earliest and pleasantest memories are of stories which were illustrated in an imaginative manner: that is to say, the artists who drew the pictures were big children themselves, and more than half believed that what they drew really did exist. Whether they were drawn cleverly or not made little difference to us; but we never got tired of Richard Doyle's fairies, or Arthur Hughes' illustrations to George Macdonald's entrancingest of stories, "At the Back of the North Wind." Their place is taken to-day by a sort of mongrel Art between the styles of Burne Jones and Du Maurier; and can only appeal to people who live under artificial conditions, and help to make their children artificial too. Our old favourites were homely and touching; and as for Richter's pictures, every one of them is a dozen stories in itself,-full of peace and pity and humour, tenderness and honest kindly laughter. "Guck in die weite Welt," they say: "There's a world for you!"

That's what we want; and whatever views artists themselves hold about their business, the fact remains that children, who we know are so impressionable, cannot help taking a very emotional view of Art: so that not even the skill of a Degas can add a featherweight of interest if the moral intention is not involved. To children (and must we not all become as children) every work of Art is a drama, a moral tale, and is only interesting as it deals with that important distinction between what is pretty and what is ugly, what is good and what is bad. "Once upon a time" does not mean *never*, but *always*; and the story which begins in that way, and ends in promise of prolonged joy, treats of our faiths and hopes, loves and fears, among mountains of glassy difficulties,

oceans of time, dark forests of brutal selfishness, kindly animals, and royal wealth of fidelity in beggar guise. From its beginning to its end the plot is laid in symbolical scenery and requires, perhaps, considerable insight and a peculiar faculty to picture it properly.

The odd, fantastic and unexpected, is not at all necessarily the imaginative; and the artist who concocts his monsters out of these materials alone, seldom lifts us from time into eternity. His dragon is never the powerful symbol a grotesque ought to be; but only a nursery bogie, with claws and a tail,—a thing to frighten children with, not to please or instruct them.

Art, then, has a double mission. It has a material and a spiritual duty to fulfil. Its material duty is, as we have seen, to make and decorate useful things. Its spiritual business is to remind us that man does not live by bread alone; to bless our toil by perpetual promise, and to make its exercise a pleasure instead of a pain. This is its subject-matter: and I cannot think of a better way of describing it than by the word "Fairy-tale"; but, as I have tried to show throughout this book, a work of art is none the less a fairy-tale because its meaning cannot be exactly described in words. Fairy-tales are written in sounds and sights that go straight from the eyes and ears to the heart. They appeal to our feelings; and we often say, rightly enough, that our feelings are too great for words. And most of this book has been written in order to show that the humbler paths of ornament are not wanting in meaning, but are only ornamental so far as they are full of meaning; and that the truths we can comprehend are not the only ones, but that perhaps the greatest truths of all are the most incomprehensible.

The processes of Art are synthetic; it classifies things according to what it considers their intentions, and by their gestures. In a classification of this kind the usual scientific distinctions are not so much disregarded as surpassed, and things inanimate and animate are compared together. There is only one kingdom in Nature—the kingdom of living things, to which we belong equally with the oak and the crystal. In this category the most important things

are not always the largest, the cleverest, or the most complicated, but the ones which reveal life best. This disregard for their actual differences in weight, size, distance and intelligence, together with the habit of taking a part for the whole—a leaf, for instance, or a flower instead of a plant—is a strong feature in all fairy-tales and symbolical or decorative Art; and contrasts in a marked manner with realistic work, which depends on pointing out these differences before anything else.

Thus we shall often recognise the justice of a custom which reduces mountains to molehills, makes gnats as large as camels and camels as insignificant as gnats, counts three trees in a forest and six leaves on each tree, and in a hundred different ways casts down the mighty from their seats and exalts the humble and meek. Such inconsistencies as these are the result of neither innocence nor ignorance, but the giving to each factor in the design that importance which its meaning as a symbol assigns it. All the things that surround us make up the words by which we try to express what we think and feel about our origin and destinies; and as on a printed page all the letters occupy about the same space, and the same letters help to spell one thing in this combination and another thing in that, so we must try and print the history of man's thought, the results of his experience, the flights of his imagination and his hopes, with these capitals, italics, and lower-case letters from Nature's fount in many a different combination. Besides his humbler brethren in the fields and the sea and the air, man has surrounded himself with implements and conventions which have become as much a part of his life as its shell is to a snail. He wraps himself in clothes, and lives in houses, and meets his kind in churches, workshops, and parliaments. No sooner does he do so than these also become elements of his speech, letters of his language. There are other things, too, whose origin is lost in dearest myth, gifts of some godlike or eponymous hero, objects which he cannot do without, so that they become worshipped, idealised, humanised, and types of mediation between an otherwise almost helpless man and the fruits of the earth he is glad to gather, or the unseen powers he credits with his

successes and failures. Such are his plough, his boat, his net, his bed, his chest, table, and altar. It is the infinity of his subject-matter that should vex the artist more than the difficulty of finding a worthy theme for his pencil or chisel. Think of all that a boat, for instance, ought to mean to man. He fishes from it; it is the faithful charger he trusts himself to on the deceitful sea. It is built like a swan or duck, as buoyant as they and, like them, as simple in curve as the elements it contends with, sweeping wind and crested wave (fig. 38). It is an argo, type of noble discovery



Fig. 38.—The Boat as a Motive of Decoration.

and venture, for which heroes leave their homes and embark to face unknown seas, monsters of one-eyed prejudice, procrastinating harpies, irresolute whirlpools, and scornful incredulity, to search for fleeces of gold, balmy Americas, new kingdoms, or old truths.

One is anxious, in writing a book that pretends to be practical, to avoid as far as possible an undue effervescence of sentiment; but unless we charge our cannon with powder as well as shot, unless we back our motives with enthusiasm, our firing will have no effect. These motives, of which I have taken the boat as an instance, are the central ideas of world-wide myth, and the artist who wishes to use them for purposes of decoration, ought to know and sympathise

with what they have always meant; or rather, for few of us can as yet be scholars as well as artists, he must try and give his pictures the feelings of those who spend their lives in simple companionship with them. If we can do that, we need no scholarship to help our Art. But because I should lengthen this essay beyond all intention if I were to attempt dealing with many of these motives of ornament, I shall confine myself to the superficial discussion of only one, and that of a kind which man has found to his hand and has not manufactured.

The tree is a source of myth and decoration that has been universally accepted, from its frequency and obvious analogy, not only to our own life, but to every religion and institution in which mankind has been interested, and by the success of which he has considered himself civilised. The theme is such a great one, and has been dealt with so often and at such length, that it would be arrogant on my part to pretend to any detailed description of its extent. All I shall do now is to point out a few of the most salient features of the tree in its symbolical character, which are as serviceable now as they ever were, and more useful to the student of decorative Art than to the antiquarian.

We can never divorce the history and practice of Art from the idea of the growth of some living thing, and it is the tree which has been throughout this essay a type, in my mind, of the way in which Art has grown and flourished, and of the way also in which every one of us may cultivate the Art instincts in himself. Whether it is regarded, then, as the symbol of our own or of other life and work, or as a type of that inner existence which is just as real to us, our faiths and our thoughts, the tree, if it is a stout one, is rooted in the soil of solid facts, that is to say, material necessities, popular demands, or, if you will have it so, the will of God or the inevitableness of fate. Soon its fibres are welded together in co-operative unity to lift its hope out of the dark and mysterious chambers of its birth, to cope with storm and rain and sunshine, to find its place above or below its fellows in the world, to struggle, wound or be wounded, in the fierce competition round it, and all the

time putting out a branch here and a branch there to seize some opportunity of growth, some coign of vantage it may occupy before another. Then, when its prime is reached, its manhood certain, it divides and subdivides its energy into many efforts, feeling and pushing its way in every direction, like the agent of an active firm; spreading its leaves at length in unctuous breadth of satisfaction and diffuse content. Rich in exuberance, the bounds of its ambition are reached; it seeks no further conquests, and turns to develop itself at home, and obey instincts of self-perpetuation. In wealth of scent and colour it crowns itself with bloom, and entertains busy ambassadors from foreign courts, humming betrothal into flattered ears. This is the heyday of its year. Through summer's heat it lifts a tent to shelter all who seek protection in its shadow, and as autumn approaches it is busy planning its children's fortunes, or storing treasure in mysterious chambers of seed and fruit. Year after year it acts the image of its whole life, is born, lives and dies, and the long recurrent night of winter, as of each day, is only the reminder of a still longer but not perpetual night through which all lives must pass. Life and death, day and night, summer and winter, dark ages and light ages: through what eons of opposites we revolve, marking the seconds on that clock whose minute-hand measures a thousand years before it returns; taking life from the source of life, yielding it, haply with dignity, before we take it again!

In such a general view of its functions, the tree of decorative Art is the briefest possible statement of a tree and of those parts of it which we want emphasised; and as it is generally the whole life of the tree that is meant, we shall often find bud and flower and fruit represented on the same trunk, regardless of their natural sequence. The various forms of it, and of which fig. 39 is the central or Egyptian type, necessarily depend on the number of its branches, and how they are inserted in the main trunk, and also on the relation of the trunk to the head. As merely a traditional shape, that is to say, when its outline is used to give other things besides trees, a sentiment of the tree, or a connection with its meaning, the distinction we should usually make between the head and the

trunk is not taken much into account, and the whole effect is that of a short-handled spoon or ladle (fig. 40, a). This form is repeated in the shapes of many musical instruments, and in other things which involve the idea of a bulbous or globular expansion, such as the unopened calyx of a crocus, or the half-blown bubble in glass or soapy water. The study of these analogies and their enumeration would make a most interesting and useful branch of traditional investigation. It is, in fact, the unexpected discovery of them, which



FIG. 39.—AN EGYPTIAN TREE.

gives the fillip to all imaginative work, and their spontaneous use which perhaps more than anything else distinguishes poetry from prose.

If we turn the tree, in this pear-shaped form of it, upside down, we shall obtain a simple form of bottle or vase (fig. 40, b), which is itself the root of a vast family of traditionally decorative ideas, whose chief significance is seen when flowers or a plant grow out of it. It is then evidently the earth obedient to God's command on the third day, bringing forth her verdant offspring, while the rest of that

week's toil may be typified by the actual painting on the vase itself of every living thing, including man himself; in order to remind us how all great work has to be done. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"—the happiest of all conditions—"till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return."

Into the more complicated tree myths, Eastern and Scandinavian, I am not qualified to enter, nor do I particularly wish to do so here. They are doubtless full of mysterious truths, but are, I think, encumbered with details more interesting to the antiquarian student than

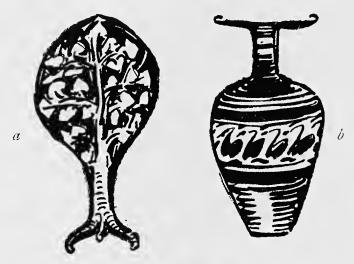


FIG. 40.—TREE AND VASE.

applicable to the religious and artistic requirements of the present day. I should like a Renaissance of Art to be founded on the deepest possible religious convictions, but I feel those convictions, besides being instinctive and spontaneous, must be as simple as possible, if they are to have an unaffected echo in our Art. On details of dogma people will always disagree; on the main facts of life we cannot quarrel, because we must always submit to them. We must take this as the first meaning of the tree symbol, but there are of course many other ideas connected with it which possess immense importance. While the leaves are falling, the tree is maturing its fruit, and in the heart of the fruit the seeds lie. These

are such treasure-houses of suggestion and mystery that they have always taken a prominent place among decorative shapes, especially in Eastern art with its vegetable proclivities, where they are idealised in a hundred graceful and exuberant ways. Our less contemplative and more practical minds prefer to sow the seed or trace the development of the bud, which is only another sort of seed that the parent stem cannot make up its mind to part with.

We have already shown how closely connected the bud is with our best traditions, what quaint shapes it takes on the spiral and what services it performs there. Prominent among these its cruciform attitude claims our attention, not only because that is the simplest and most symmetrical method of vegetable growth, but also because its central head and laterally uplifted arms suggest the figure most associated in our minds with the Christian religion—the attitude of crucifixion, or of supplication and submission to the All-Father's will. It is the recognition of such accidents as this, not necessarily with strained emphasis but with simple acceptance and recollection, that would give our Art its universality, and bind the humblest things to the most important. It is, as I have said, their gestures which make things valuable to the artist; their accidental imitation or suggestion of other tricks and actions which in more organic life are full of significance or meaning. The best instance I can think of at present is in Richter's picture of the return of the prodigal son. The prodigal's old father has been sitting at his house door, reading. When he sees the spendthrift coming he gets up at once, in such haste that his spectacles fall on to the ground, and he spreads out his trembling hand to shelter, welcome, and forgive his son. The old man's gesture is repeated in the large-hearted leaves of the creeper on the porch above his head, which curl and bend and spread, rejoicing that the dead one is, after all, alive, and the lost one found. This resemblance of gesture is also at the root of those metamorphoses so popular in Greek mythology, which mark a gentle innocence and a fellow-feeling with Nature that our sterner and more introspective religion often loses sight of. Who, with eyes to see, can refuse to credit trees with personal life and feeling, or deny them souls with some halfarticulate message for us, or what harm can accrue from the innocent idolatry of simple minds which cannot grasp ideas till they see them translated into homely facts, if it makes them happy and kindly, conscious that every life has its claim on our respect and care?

Another form of the tree will lead us to the caduceus, and suggest many delightful kinds of staff and sceptre. The ivy, twisting round the trunk, is the serpent, genius of the soil, earth spirit, symbol of cunning craft, dividing spiral, promising us wisdom, rewarding us with dust; tempting us to taste, to be as gods, and to suffer with them.

The Paradisaical tree introduces a new factor into the tradition in the shape of its attendant "acolytes." Adam and Eve stand on either side of the tree of knowledge, the thieves hang by Christ's side. The lion and the unicorn support the royal arms. Instances of these witnesses are everywhere to be found, but the reason of their presence lies for us less in abstruse theology or savage custom and instinct, than in a natural temptation to fill the empty spaces under the tree, and on each side of the trunk, with figures that will have some relation and dependence on the meaning we want to give it.

Into the decorative treatment of other things, which from their constant use have become recognised subjects of design, this book does not enter. To write about them, even superficially, so as to be of any use to the student, would be an undertaking of great labour and research; nor would such a treatise be finally, I imagine, of much help in reforming our ideas of ornamental design, unless it could carefully discriminate between those types which are still full of meaning and association, and those which, however beautiful and suggestive in the past, are useless to-day because they no longer represent our habits of work and thought. The simplicity of types depends primarily on simplicity of lives. Our own artificial customs, hidden under ugly conventions, are incapable of producing them. A reformation in manners must precede a reformation in Art, and, till we clear our lives from the thousand trivial things that baulk our truer culture, our ideas on Art will remain anarchic. That group of traditions, for instance, which cluster round the "Table" and of which the Last Supper is the central type, can have no significance for us till our meals become the punctual refreshment of a household in its daily labour, hallowed by hunger, hospitality, spotlessness of plate and linen, good cooking, and a suitable acknowledgment of the sacredness and mystery of food. The pursuit of game is a noble theme so long as the sportsman's dinner depends on his success, and while the advantages of healthy out-door exercise and the beauties and science of wood- and water-craft surmount the butcher's trade. But all the beautiful accessories of the chase, and the strange acquaintance with and appreciation of the wild animal life it dealt with, which takes such a prominent position among artistic traditions, has vanished before the gun, and its cruel sacrifice of life to the size of the bag. And so it is with other traditions that were once real and true because they were founded on the necessities of life, and illustrated, as far as they could, its unity. To hint that decoration could have any such meanings now is perhaps hopelessly out of date. Nothing, apparently, is further from the thought of modern decorators than that their efforts should, however indirectly, lead anybody to feel and think. To the artist, Art has no higher mission than to earn the praise of the public, as a mountebank does, by tickling it with clever and unexpected surprises, legerdemain and optical delusions. Art as a social force is dead, because it has no faith to preach, no gospel to proclaim. The only Art that the public sees is the art of the poster, the art of advertisement, a democratic art with a vengeance, dedicated to the man in the street, mainly illustrative of his sisters there, and most successful when it appeals to the vulgarest mind in the cleverest way. I am no prophet. I would lay the blame at no one's door or at every one's. Far from despairing, I would hope and bid others hope. I would recognise the germs of good in every effort so long as it was genuine. I would welcome the exhibition of any feeling, if it was frankly confessed; for vicious Art is not the painting of vicious feelings because you like vice, but because you deliberately paint what you believe to be wrong.

It would be far better to give up all idea of Art than to do that, or to paint what we have no feeling for. It is not Art we

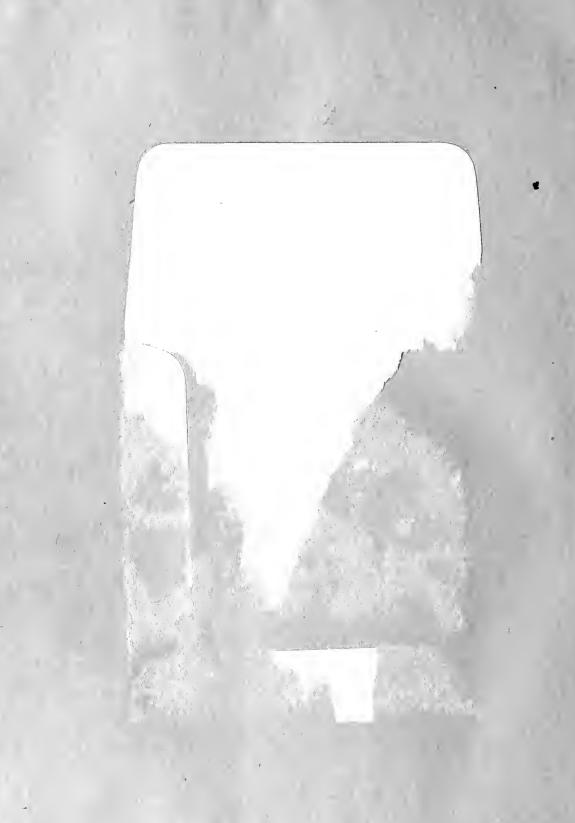
want, it is faith; not dogmas, but perception, and the power to feel "God in everything without understanding Him in the least." If we can get those feelings into ourselves, Art will follow easily enough, for it is nothing but our way of saying we possess them.

Therefore, before we lose or reject these old traditional symbols which we inherit from our fathers, who meant much by them, let us see if our hearts are so empty, or our heads so stolid, that we cannot inspire them with new life, new thoughts, new feelings, from a world that is, after all, still young. We cannot any longer separate religion from Art. What we believe, what we love, what, even, we should like to believe and love, we must put into some sort of shape, make some sort of creed or confession of, however loosely worded. And if we have nothing at first to say, let us waste no time in vain regret, but try and throw ourselves open to every natural influence we can—bird and beast and creeping thing, wind and rain and sun, mountain, river and forest, and crown ourselves laureates to Nature, Poets of the Poor. We cannot paint till we can feel; when we can feel, we can paint or sing with ease.

And do you think this is incompatible with imagination? Do you suppose God ever made man, and gave him a gift to separate him from his fellows? That would be no blessing, but the direst curse. Do you think your imagination hall-marked, precious, a thing to be carefully kept and guarded? Far from that, it is your commission, as apostle, to prove the universal brotherhood of all men and things. A precious gift indeed—none more so; but the greater it is, the less you will glory in its possession: for it is the talent you must put out to usury—the life you must ever be losing if you would gain a greater—the only key that will open every heart and unlock the secrets of the world.

THE END.

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